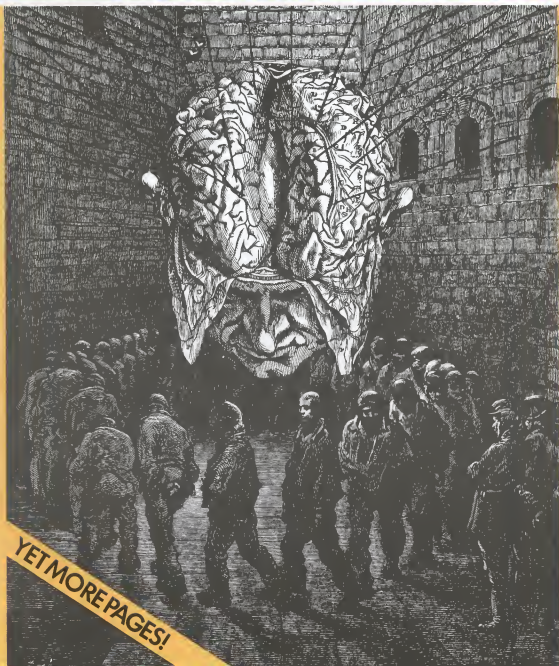


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YET MORE PAGES!

interzone

No 9 Autumn 1984

EDITORIAL

Interzone grows by yet another four pages with this issue—which also happens to feature an “all-star” line-up of contributors. The Arts Council of Great Britain has renewed its subsidy to the magazine in the current financial year, for which we are immensely grateful. We hope to achieve more effective distribution in the very near future, which should result in increased sales. New subscriptions are coming in at a pleasingly brisk rate, and we are delighted to report that we now have three lifetime subscribers. Sir Clive Sinclair was the first, as we acknowledged in our last editorial. The second is a leading British novelist whose identity we must not disclose, and the third is Mr D.M. Hardy, a reader who lives in Matlock, Derbyshire. Our thanks to both. As we said in IZ 8, other readers who approve of what we are doing, and who would like to support us with a gift of £50 or more, are welcome to become lifetime subscribers too. (We continue to pay good rates to our authors, while the editorial team gives its services free.)

In addition to six stories, we have two special features in the present issue. “Synaptic Intrigue” is a portfolio of work by Richard Kadrey, whose collages were also featured in issue 7 (illustrating Michael Blumlein’s “Tissue Ablation...”) and in issue 8 (frontispiece). Mr Kadrey is a member of the growing West Coast colony of Interzone contributors. A former neighbour of Scott Bradfield’s (as it happens), he now lives in the same city as Michael Blumlein—although the two had not heard of each other before we brought them together, fortuitously, in the pages of IZ. “Feminist SF” is a short article which we commissioned from Sarah Lefanu and Jen Green of The Women’s Press when we discovered that they were about to launch a new sf line. Interzone supports their venture wholeheartedly, and we hope that the appeal they make for new women writers of sf (preferably from this side of the Atlantic!) will benefit this magazine as much as it does their publishing house.

In our next issue, number 10, the emphasis will be on new and fairly new writers. That one should be out in November 1984. Meanwhile, our competition for “radical hard science fiction” remains open. This was announced last time and has raised a certain amount of comment (see this issue’s letter column). A few people seem to have latched onto the “hard sf” label while ignoring the qualifying adjective “radical.” We do not wish to publish the sort of hard sf that’s already available in, say, Analog magazine. We are looking for something different, which is still recognizably science fiction—if the writers are willing and able to provide it. At the same time we shall continue to publish fantasy stories, radical “soft” sf, and the kind of “organic” fiction which Abi Frost has called for in the other competition announced last issue (see her letter in IZ 8 for details). We shall continue to present a mix of the best imaginative fiction which comes our way.

Should you wish to enter our radical hard sf competition please send your story to us by 31st December 1984.

David Pringle

Cover by Richard Kadrey

Frontispiece by Edwin Dorf

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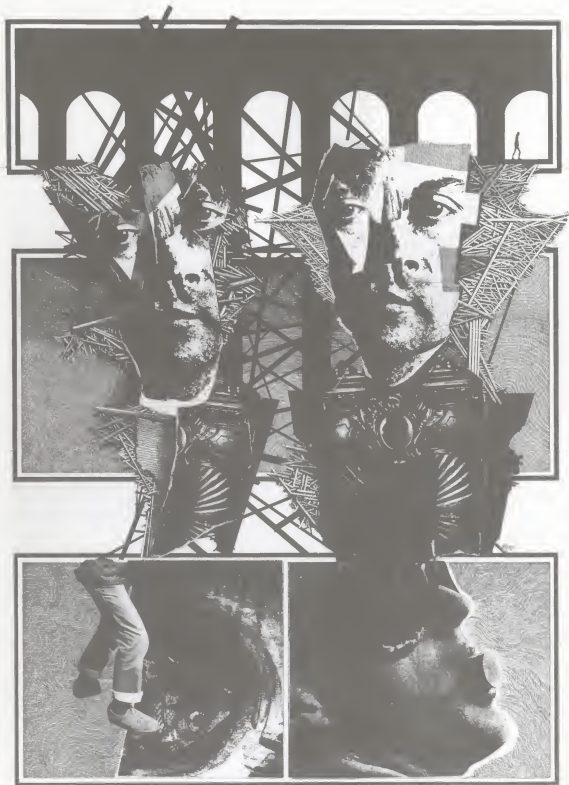


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The Object of the Attack

J.G. Ballard

From the Forensic Diaries of Dr. Richard Greville,
Chief Psychiatric Adviser, Home Office.

7 June 1987. An unsettling week—two Select Committees; the Biggs trial with its vindictive sentence (Ipanema and its topless beaches were clearly a more desperate hell than Parkhurst will ever seem); the failure of mother's suspect Palmer to reach its reserve at Sotheby's (I suggested that they might re-attribute it to Keating, which doubly offended them); and wearying arguments with Sarah about our endlessly postponed divorce and her over-reliance on ECT—she is strongly for the former, I as strongly against the latter.... I suspect that her patients are suffering for me.

But, above all, there was my visit to The Boy. Confusing, ugly—the stench of purines in the excrement smeared on his cell walls indicates huge overdoses of largactil—and yet strangely inspiring. Inviting me to Daventry, Governor Henson referred to him, as does everyone else in the Home Office, as "the boy", but I feel he has now earned the capital letters. Years of being moved about, from Rampton to Broadmoor to the Home Office Special Custody Unit at Daventry, the brutal treatment and solitary confinement have failed to subdue him.

He stood in the shower stall of the punishment wing, wearing full canvas restraint suit, and plainly driven mad by the harsh light reflected from the white tiles, which were streaked with blood from a leaking confusion on his forehead. He has been punched about a great deal, and flinched from me as I approached, but I felt that he almost invited physical attack as a means of provoking himself. He is far smaller than I expected, and looks only 17 or 18 (though he is now 29), but is still strong and dangerous—President Reagan and Her Majesty were probably lucky to escape.

Case notes: missing caps to both canines, contact dermatitis of the scalp, a left-handed intention tremor, and signs of an hysterical photophobia. He appeared to be gasping with fear, and Governor Henson tried to reassure him, but I assume that far from being afraid he

felt nothing but contempt for us and was deliberately hyperventilating. He was chanting what sounded like "Allahu akbar," the expulsive God-is-Great cry used by the whirling dervishes to induce their hallucinations, the same over-oxygenation of the brain brought on, in milder form, by church hymns and community singing at Cup Finals.

The Boy certainly resembles a religious fanatic—perhaps he is a Shi'ite Muslim convert? He only paused to stare at the distant aerials of Daventry visible through a skylight. When a warder closed the door he began to whimper and pump his lungs again. I asked the orderly to clean the wound on his forehead, but as I helped with the dressing he lunged forward and knocked my briefcase to the floor. For a few seconds he tried to provoke an assault, but then caught sight of the Sotheby's catalogue among my spilled papers, and the reproduction of mother's Samuel Palmer. That serene light over the visionary meadows, the boughs of the oaks like windows of stained glass in the cathedral of heaven, together appeared to calm him. He gazed at me in an uncanny way, bowing as if he assumed that I was the painter.

Later, in the Governor's office, we came to the real purpose of my visit. The months of disruptive behaviour have exhausted everyone, but above all they are terrified of an escape, and a second attack on HMQ. Nor would it help the Atlantic Alliance if the U.S. President were assassinated by a former inmate of a British mental hospital. Henson and the resident medical staff, with the encouragement of the Home Office, are keen to switch from chlorpromazine to the new NX series of central nervous system depressants—a spin-off of Porton Down's work on nerve gases. Prolonged use would induce blurred vision and locomotor ataxia, but also suppress all cortical function, effectively lobotomising him. I thought of my wrangles with Sarah over ECT—psychiatry cannot wait to return to its dark ages—and tactfully vetoed the use of NX until I had studied the medical history in the Special Branch dossier. But I was thinking of The Boy's eyes as he gazed on that dubious Palmer.

The Assassination Attempt

In 1982, during the state visit of President Reagan to the United Kingdom, an unsuccessful aerial attack was made upon the royal family and their guest at Windsor Castle. Soon after the President and Mrs Reagan arrived by helicopter, a miniature glider was observed flying across the Home Park in a north-westerly direction. The craft, a primitive hang-glider, was soaring at a height of some 120 feet, on a course that would have carried it over the walls of the Castle. However, before the Special Branch and Secret Service marksmen could fire upon the glider it became entangled in the aerials above the royal mausoleum at Frogmore House and fell to the ground beside the Long Walk.

Strapped to the chest of the unconscious pilot was an explosive harness containing 24 sticks of commercial gelignite linked to NCB detonators, and a modified parachute ripcord that served as a hand-operated triggering device. The pilot was taken into custody, and no word of this presumed assassination attempt was released to the public or to the Presidential party. HMQ alone was informed, which may explain Her Majesty's impatience with the President when, on horseback, he paused to exchange banter with a large group of journalists.

The pilot was never charged or brought to trial, but detained under the mental health acts in the Home Office observation unit at Springfield Hospital. He was a 24-year-old former video-games programmer and failed Jesuit novice named Matthew Young. For the past eight months he had been living in a lock-up garage behind a disused Baptist church in Highbury, north London, where he had constructed his flying machine. Squadron Leader D.H. Walsh of the RAF Museum, Hendon, identified the craft as an exact replica of a glider designed by the 19th century aviation pioneer Otto Lilienthal. Later research showed that the glider was the craft in which Lilienthal met his death in 1896. Fellow-residents in the lock-up garages, former girl-friends of the would-be assassin and his probation officer all witnessed his construction of the glider during the spring of 1982. However, how he launched this antique machine—the nearest high ground is the Heathrow control tower five miles to the east—or remained airborne for his flight across the Home Park, is a mystery to this day.

Later, in the interview cell, The Boy sat safely handcuffed between his two warders. The bruised and hyperventilating figure had been replaced by a docile youth resembling a reformed skinhead who had miraculously seen the light. Only the eerie smile which he turned upon me so obligingly reminded me of the glider and the harness packed with explosive. As always, he refused to answer any questions put to him, and we sat in a silence broken only by his whispered refrain.

Ignoring these cryptic mutterings, I studied a list of those present at Windsor Castle.

President Reagan, HM The Queen, Mrs Reagan, Prince Philip, Prince Charles, Princess Diana...

The U.S. Ambassador, Mr Billy Graham, Apollo astronaut Colonel Tom Stafford, Mr Henry Ford III,

Mr James Stewart, the presidents of Heinz, IBM and Lockheed Aircraft, and assorted Congressmen, military and naval attachés, State Department and CIA pro-consuls...

Lord Delfont, Mr Eric Morecambe, Mr Andrew Lloyd-Webber, Miss Joanna Lumley...

In front of Young, on the table between us, I laid out the photographs of President Reagan, The Queen, Prince Philip, Charles and Diana. He showed not a flicker of response, leaned forward and with his scarred chin nudged the Sotheby's catalogue from my open briefcase. He held the Palmer reproduction to his left shoulder, obliquely smiling his thanks. Sly and disingenuous, he was almost implying that I was his accomplice. I remembered how very manipulative such psychopaths could be—Myra Hindley, Brady and Mary Bell had convinced various naive and well-meaning souls of their "religious conversions."

Without thinking, I drew the last photograph from the dossier: Colonel Stamford in his white space suit floating free above a spacecraft during an orbital flight.

The chanting stopped. I heard Young's heels strike the metal legs of his chair as he drew back involuntarily. A focal seizure of the right hand rattled his handcuff. He stared at the photograph, but the gaze of his eyes was far beyond the cell around us, and I suspected that he was experiencing a warning aura before an epileptic attack. With a clear shout to us all, he stiffened in his chair and slipped to the floor in a grand mal.

As his head hammered the warders' feet I realised that he had been chanting, not "Allahu akbar," but "Astro-naut"...

Astro-nought...?

Matthew Young: the Personal History of a Psychopath

So, what is known of The Boy? The Special Branch investigators assembled a substantial dossier on this deranged young man.

Born 1958, Abu Dhabi, father manager of Amoco desalination plant. Childhood in the Gulf area, Alaska and Aberdeen. Educational misfit, with suspected petit mal epilepsy, but attended Strathclyde University for two terms in 1975, computer sciences course. Joined Workers Revolutionary Party 1976, arrested outside U.S. Embassy, London, during anti-nuclear demonstration. Worked as scaffolder and painter, Jodrell Bank Radio-Observatory, 1977; prosecuted for malicious damage to reflector dish. Jesuit novice, St. Francis Xavier seminary, Dundalk, 1978; expelled after three weeks for sexual misconduct with mother of fellow novice. Fined for being drunk and disorderly during "Sculpture in the Space Age" exhibition at Serpentine Gallery, London. Video-games programmer, Virgin Records, 1980. Operated pirate radio station attempting to jam transmissions from Space Shuttle, prosecuted by British Telecom. Registered private patents on video-games "Target Apollo" and "Shuttle Attack," 1981. Numerous convictions for assault, possession of narcotics, dangerous driving, unemployment benefit frauds, disturbances of the peace. 1982, privately published his "Cosmological Testament," a Blakean farrago of nature mysticism, apocalyptic fantasy and pseudo-mathematical proofs of the non-existence of space-time...

All in all, a classic delinquent, with that history of messianic delusions and social maladjustment found in regicides throughout history. The choice of Mr Reagan reflects the persistent appeal of the theme of presidential assassination, which seems to play on the edgy dreams of so many lonely psychopaths. Invested in the President of the United States, the world's most powerful leader, are not only the full office and authority of the temporal world, but the very notion of existence itself, of the continuum of time and space which encloses the assassin as much as his victim. Like the disturbed child seeking to destroy everything in its nursery, the assassin is trying to obliterate those images of himself which he identifies with his perception of the external universe. Suicide would leave the rest of existence intact, and it is the notion of existence, incarnated in the person of the President, that is the assassin's true target.

The Dream of Death by Air

"...in the Second Fall, their attempt to escape from their home planet, the peoples of the earth invite their planetary death, choosing the zero gravity of a false space and time, recapitulating in their weightlessness the agony of the First Fall of Man..."

Cosmological Testament, Book I

The Dream of Death by Water

"...the sea is an exposed cerebral cortex, the epidermis of a sleeping giant whom the Apollo and Skylab astronauts will awake with their splashdowns. All the peoples of the planet will walk, fly, entrain for the nearest beach, they will ride rapids, endure hardships, abandon continents until they at last stand together on the terminal shore of the world, then step forward..."

Cosmological Testament, Book III

The Dream of Death by Earth

"...the most sinister and dangerous realms are those devised by man during his inward colonising of his planet, applying the dreams of a degenerate outer space to his inner world—warrens, dungeons, fortifications, bunkers, oubliettes, underground garages, tunnels of every kind that riddle his mind like maggots through the brains of a corpse..."

Cosmological Testament, Book VII

A curious volume, certainly, but no hint of a dream of death by fire—and no suggestion of Reagan, nor of Her Majesty, Princess Diana, Mrs Thatcher...?

The Escape Engine: the Ames Room

14 October 1987. The Boy has escaped! An urgent call this morning from Governor Henson. I flew up to Daventry immediately in the crowded Home Office helicopter. Matthew Young has vanished, in what must be one of the most ingenious escape attempts ever devised. The Governor and his staff were in a disoriented state when I arrived. Henson paced around his office, pressing his hands against the bookshelves and re-arranging the furniture, as if not trusting its existence. Home Office and Special Branch people were everywhere, but I managed to calm Henson and piece together the story.

Since my previous visit they had relaxed Young's regime. Mysteriously, the Samuel Palmer illustration

in Sotheby's catalogue had somehow calmed him. He no longer defaced his cell walls, volunteered to steam-hose them himself, and had pinned the Palmer above his bunk, gazing at it as if it were a religious icon. (If only it were a Keating—the old rogue would have been delighted. As it happens, Keating's reputation as a faker may have given Young his plan for escape.)

Young declined to enter the exercise yard—the high British Telecom aerials clearly unsettled him—so Henson arranged for him to use the prison chapel as a recreation room. Here the trouble began, as became clear when the Governor showed me into the chapel, a former private cinema furnished with pews, altar, pulpit, etc. For reasons of security, the doors were kept locked, and the warders on duty kept their eyes on Young by glancing through the camera slit in the projection room. As a result, the warders saw the interior of the chapel from one perspective only. Young had cunningly taken advantage of this, re-arranging the pews, pulpit and altar table to construct what in effect was an Ames Room—Adelbert Ames Jr., the American psychologist, devised a series of trick rooms, which seemed entirely normal when viewed through a peephole, but were in fact filled with unrelated fragments of furniture and ornaments.

Young's version of the Ames Room was far more elaborate. The cross and brass candelabra appeared to stand on the altar table, but actually hung in mid-air ten feet away, suspended from the ceiling on lengths of cotton teased from his overalls. The pews had been raised on pliers of prayer books and Bibles to create the illusion of an orderly nave. But once we left the projection room and entered the chapel we saw that the pews formed a stepped ramp that climbed to the ventilation grille behind the altar table. The warders glancing through the camera slit in the projection room had seen Young apparently on his knees before the cross, when in fact he had been sitting on the top-most pew in the ramp, loosening the bolts around the metal grille.

Henson was appalled by Young's escape, but I was impressed by the cleverness of this optical illusion. Like Henson, the Home Office inspectors were certain that another assassination attempt might be made upon Her Majesty. However, as we gazed at that bizarre chapel something convinced me that the Queen and the President were not in danger. On the shabby wall behind the altar Young had pinned a dozen illustrations of the American and Russian space programmes, taken from newspapers and popular magazines. All the photographs of the astronauts had been defaced, the Skylab and Shuttle craft marked with obscene graffiti. The Boy had prayed to the astronauts, but I could guess his prayers. He had constructed a Black Chapel, which at the same time was a complex escape device that would set him free, not merely from Daventry, but from the threat posed by the astronauts and from that far larger prison whose walls are those of space itself.

The Astro-Messiah

Colonel Thomas Jefferson Stamford, USAF (ret). Born 1931, Brigham City, Utah. Eagle scout, 1945. B.S. (Physics), Caltech, 1953. Graduated US Air Force Academy, 1957. Served Viet Nam, 1964-69. Enrolled NASA 1970; deputy ground controller, Skylab III.

1974, rumoured commander of secret Apollo 20 mission to the Moon which landed remote-controlled nuclear missile station in the Mare Imbrium. Retired 1975, appointed Vice President, Pepsi-Cola Corporation. 1976, script consultant to 20th Century Fox for projected biopic *Men with Fins*.

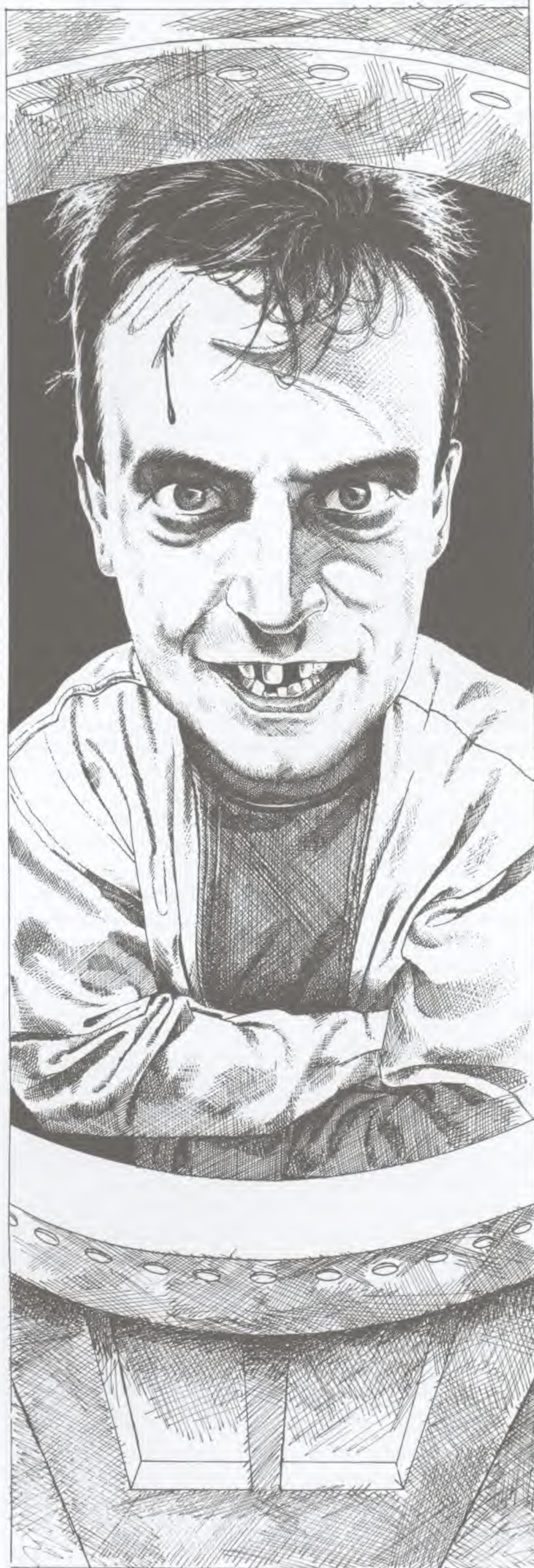
1977, associated with The Precious Light Movement, a California-based consciousness-raising group calling for legalisation of LSD. Resigned 1978, hospitalised Veterans Administration Hospital, Fresno. On discharge begins nine months retreat at Truth Mountain, Idaho, inter-denominational order of lay monks. 1979, founds Spaceways, drug rehabilitation centre, Santa Monica. 1980-81, associated with Billy Graham, shares platform on revivalist missions to Europe and Australia. 1982, visits Windsor Castle with President Reagan. 1983, forms the evangelical trust COME Incorporated, tours Alabama and Mississippi as self-proclaimed 13th Disciple. 1984, visits Africa, S.E. Asia, intercedes Iraq/Iran conflict, addresses Nato Council of Ministers, urges development of laser weapons and neutron bomb. 1986, guest of Royal Family at Buckingham Palace, appears in Queen's Christmas TV broadcast, successfully treats Prince William, becomes confidante and spiritual adviser to Princess Diana. Named Man of the Year by Time Magazine, profiled by Newsweek as "Space-Age Messiah" and "founder of first space-based religion."

Could this much-admired former astronaut, a folk hero who clearly fulfilled the role of 1980s Lindbergh, have been the real target of the Windsor attack? Lindbergh had once hobnobbed with kings and chancellors, but his cranky political beliefs had become tainted by pro-Nazi sentiments. By contrast Col. Stamford's populist mix of born-again Christianity and anti-communist rhetoric seemed little more than an outsider's long shot at the White House. Now and then, watching Stamford's rallies on television, I detected the same hypertonic facial musculature that could be seen in Hitler, Gaddafi and the more excitable of Khomeini's mullahs, but nothing worthy of the elaborate assassination attempt, a psychodrama in itself, that Matthew Young had mounted in his Lilienthal glider.

And yet...who better than a pioneer aeronaut to kill a pioneer astronaut, to turn the clock of space exploration back to zero?

10 February 1988. For the last three months an energetic search has failed to find any trace of Matthew Young. The Special Branch guard on the Queen, Prime Minister and senior cabinet members has been tightened, and several of the royals have been issued with small pistols. One hopes that they will avoid injuring themselves, or each other. Already the disguised fashion-accessory holster worn by Princess Diana has inspired a substantial copycat industry, and London is filled with young women wearing stylised cod-pieces (none of them realise why), like cast members from a musical version of *The Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*.

The Boy's former girl-friends and surviving relatives, his probation officer and fellow programmers at Virgin Records have been watched and/or interrogated. A few suspected sightings have occurred: in November



Illustrated by David O'Connor

an eccentric young man in the leather gaiters and antique costume of a World War I aviator enrolled for a course of lessons at Elstree Flying School, only to suffer an epileptic seizure after the first take-off. Hundreds of London Underground posters advertising Col. Stamford's Easter rally at Earls Court have been systematically defaced. At Pinewood Studios an arsonist has partially destroyed the sets for the \$100 million budget science-fiction films *The Revenge of R2D2* and *C3PO Meets E.T.* A night intruder penetrated the offices of COME Inc. in the Tottenham Court Road and secretly dubbed an obscene message over Col. Stamford's inspirational address on thousands of promotional videos. In several Piccadilly amusement arcades the Space Invaders games have been reprogrammed to present Col. Stamford's face as the target.

More significant, perhaps, a caller with the same voiceprint as Matthew Young has persistently tried to telephone the Archbishop of Canterbury. Three days ago the vergers at Westminster Abbey briefly apprehended a youth praying before a bizarre tableau consisting of Col. Stamford's blood-stained space-suit and helmet, stolen from their display case in the Science Museum, which he had set up in a niche behind the High Altar. The rare blood group, BRh, is not Col. Stamford's, but The Boy's.

The reports of Matthew Young at prayer reminded me of Governor Henson's description of the prisoner seen on his knees in that illusionist chapel he had constructed at Daventry. There is an eerie contrast between the vast revivalist rally being televised at this moment from the Parc des Princes in Paris, dominated by the spotlight figure of the former astronaut, and the darkened nave of the Abbey where an escaped mental patient prayed over a stolen space suit smeared with his own blood. The image of outer space, from which Col. Stamford draws so much of his religious inspiration, for Matthew Young seems identified with some unspecified evil, with the worship of a false messiah. His prayers in the Daventry chapel, as he knelt before the illusion of an altar, were a series of postural codes, a contortionist's attempt to free himself from Col. Stamford's sinister embrace.

I read once again the testimony collected by the Special Branch:

Margaret Downs, systems analyst, Wang Computers: "He was always praying, forever on his con-founded knees. He even made me take a video of him, and studied it for hours. It was just too much..."

Doreen Jessel, health gym instructress: "At first I thought he was heavily in to anaerobics. Some kind of dynamic meditation, he called it, all acrobatic contortions. I tried to get him to see a physiotherapist..."

John Hatton, probation officer: "There was a therapeutic aspect, of which he rather convinced me against my better judgement. The contortions seemed to mimic his epilepsy..."

Reverend Morgan Evans, Samaritans: "He accepted Robert Graves's notion of the club-footed messiah—that peculiar stepped gait common to various forms of religious dance and to all myths involving the Achilles tendon. He told me that it was based on the crabbed moon-walk adopted by the astronauts to cope with zero gravity..."

Sergeant J. Mellors, RAF Regiment: "The position

was that of a kneeling marksman required to get off a lot of shots with a bolt-action rifle, such as the Lee-Enfield or the Mannlicher-Carcano. I banned him from the firing range..."

Was Matthew Young dismantling and reassembling the elements of his own mind as if they were the constituents of an Ames Room? The pilot of the Home Office helicopter spoke graphically of the spatial disorientation felt by some of the special category prisoners being moved on the Daventry shuttle, in particular the cries and contortions of a Palestinian hijacker who imagined he was a dying astronaut. Defects of the vestibular apparatus of the ear are commonly found in hijackers (as in some shamans), the same sense of spatial disorientation that can be induced in astronauts by the high-speed turntable or the zero gravity of orbital flights.

It may be, therefore, that defects of the vestibular apparatus draw their sufferers towards high-speed aircraft, and the hijack is an unconscious attempt to cure this organic affliction. Prayer, vestibular defects, hijacking—watching Col. Stamford in the Parc des Princes, I notice that he sometimes stumbles as he bows over his lectern, his hands clasped in prayer in that characteristic spasm so familiar from the news-reels and now even mimicked by TV comedians.

Is Col. Stamford trying to hijack the world?

28 March 1988. Events are moving on apace. Colonel Thomas Jefferson Stamford has arrived in London, after completing his triumphal tour of the non-communist world. He has conferred with generals and right-wing churchmen, and calmed battlefields from the Golan Heights to the western Sahara. As always, he urges the combatants to join forces against the real enemy, pushing an anti-Soviet, church-militant line that makes the CIA look like the Red Cross. Television and newspapers show him mingling with heads of state and retired premiers, with Kohl, Thatcher and Mitterand, with Scandinavian royals and the British monarch.

Throughout, Col. Stamford's earlier career as an astronaut is never forgotten. At his rallies in the Parc des Princes and Munich's Olympic Stadium these great arenas are transformed into what seems to be interior of a gigantic star-ship. By the cunning use of a circular film screen, Col. Stamford's arrival at the podium is presented as a landing from outer space, to deafening extracts from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and Holst's *Planets*. With its illusionist back-projection and trick lighting the rally becomes a huge Ames Room, a potent mix of evangelical Christianity, astronautics and cybernetic movie-making. We are in the presence of an Intelsat messiah, a mana-personality for the age of cable TV.

His thousands of followers sway in their seats, clutching COME Inc's promotional videos like Mao's Red Guards with their little red books. Are we seeing the first video religion, an extravagant light show with laser graphics by Lucasfilms? The message of the rallies, as of the videos, is that Col. Thomas Stamford has returned to earth to lead a moral crusade against atheistic Marxism, a Second Coming that has launched the 13th Disciple under the aisles of space from the altar of the Mare Imbrium.

Already two former Apollo astronauts have joined

his crusade, resigning their directorships of Avis and the Disney Corporation, and members of the Skylab and Shuttle missions have pledged their support. Will NASA one day evolve into a religious organisation? Caucus leaders in the Democratic and Republican Parties have urged Col. Stamford to stand for President. But I suspect that the Great Mission Controller in the Sky intends to bypass the Presidency and appeal directly to the U.S. public as an astro-messiah, a space ayatollah descending to earth to set up his religious republic.

The First Church of the Divine Astronaut

These messianic strains reminded me of The Boy, the self-sworn enemy of all astronauts. On the day after the Colonel's arrival in London for the Easter rally, to be attended by Prince Charles, Princess Diana and the miraculously cured Prince William, I drove to the lock-up garage in Highbury. I had repeatedly warned the Home Office of a probable assassination attempt, but they seemed too mesmerised by the Stamford fever that had seized the whole of London to believe that anyone would attack him.

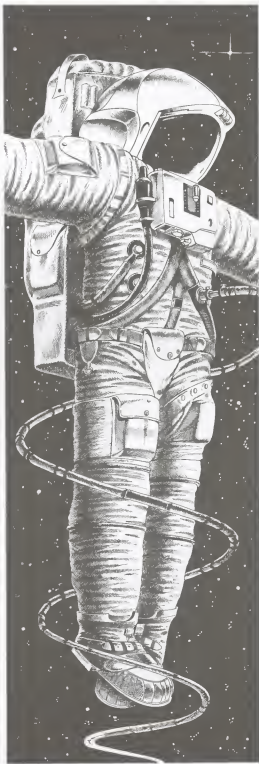
As Constable Willings waited in the rain I stared down at the oil-stained camp bed and the sink with its empty cans of instant coffee. The Special Branch investigators had stripped the shabby garage, yet pinned to the cement wall above the bed was a postcard that they had inexplicably missed. Stepping closer, I saw that it was a reproduction of a small Samuel Palmer, "A Dream of Death by Fire," a visionary scene of the destruction of a false church by the surrounding light of a true nature. The painting had been identified by Keating as one of his most ambitious frauds.

A fake Keating to describe the death of a fake messiah? Pinned to the damp cement within the past few days, the postcard was clearly Matthew Young's invitation to me. But where would I find him? Then, through the open doors, I saw the disused Baptist church behind the row of garages.

As soon as I entered its gloomy nave I was certain that Matthew Young's target had been neither President Reagan nor the Queen. The bolt cutters borrowed from Constable Willings snapped the links of the rusting chain. When he had driven away I pushed back the worm-riddled doors. At some time in the past a television company had used the deconsecrated church to store its unwanted props. Stage sets and painted panels from a discontinued science-fiction series leaned against the walls in a dusty jumble.

I entered the aisle and stood between the pews. Then, as I stepped forward, I saw a sudden diorama of the lunar surface. In front of me was a miniature film set constructed from old Stor Wors posters and props from Dr Who. Above the lunar landscape hung the figure of an astronaut flying with arms outstretched.

As I guessed, this diorama formed part of yet another Ames Room. The astronaut's figure created its illusion only when seen from the doors of the church. As I approached, however, its elements moved apart. A gloved hand hung alone, severed from the arm that seemed to support it. The detached thorax and sections of the legs drifted away from one another, suspended on threads of wire from the rafters above the nave. The head and helmet had been sliced from the shoulders, and had taken off on a flight of their own. As I stood by



the altar the dismembered astronaut flew above me, like a chromium corpse blown apart by a booby trap hidden in its life-support system.

Lying on the stone floor below this eerie spectacle was Matthew Young. He rested on his back in a scuffle of dust and cracked flagstones, his scarred mouth drawn back in a bloodless grimace to reveal the broken teeth whose caps he had crushed. He had fallen to the floor during his grand mal attack, and his outstretched fingers had torn a section of a Star Wars poster, which lay across him like a shroud. Blood pooled in a massive haematoma below his cheek-bone, as if during the focal seizure of his right hand he had been trying to put out his eye with the telescopic sight of the marksman's rifle that he clasped in his fist.

I freed his tongue and windpipe, massaged his diaphragm until his breath was even, and placed a choir cushion below his shoulders. On the floor beside him were the barrel, receiver, breech and magazine of a stockless rifle whose parts he had been oiling in the moments before his attack, and which I knew he would reassemble the instant he awoke.

Easter Day, 1988. This evening Col. Stamford's rally will be held at Earl's Court. Since his arrival in London, as a guest of Buckingham Palace, the former astronaut has been intensely busy, preparing that springboard which will propel him across the Atlantic. Three days ago he addressed the joint Houses of Parliament in Westminster Hall. In his televised speech he called for a crusade against the evil empire of the non-Christian world, for the construction of orbital nuclear bomb platforms, for the launching of geosynchronous laser weapons trained upon Teheran, Moscow and Peking. He seems to be demanding the destruction not merely of the Soviet Union but of the non-Christian world, the re-conquest of Jerusalem and the conversion of Islam.

It is clear that Col. Stamford is as demented as Hitler, but fortunately his last splashdown is at hand. I assume that Matthew Young will be attending the Earl's Court rally this evening. I did not report him to the police, confident that he would recover in time to reassemble his rifle and make his way to one of the empty projection booths beneath the roof of the arena. Seeing Col. Stamford's arrival from "outer space," The Boy will watch him from the camera window, and listen to him urge his nuclear jihad against the forces of the anti-Christ. From that narrow but never more vital perspective, the sights of his rifle, Matthew Young will be ready once again to dismantle an illusionist space and celebrate the enduring mysteries of the Ames Room.

J.G. Ballard wrote in *Interzone* 8: "I believe in madness, in the truth of the inexplicable, in the common sense of stones, in the lunacy of flowers, in the disease stored up for the human race by the Apollo astronauts." "Memories of the Space Age", a novella in which spaceflight has punctured the continuum and inflicted a profound global narcolepsy, first appeared in our second issue and has recently been reprinted in Penguin's anthology *Firebird* 3. J.G. Ballard's own formative memories, of the childhood in wartime Shanghai that irradiates his landscapes, are elaborated in a new novel, *Empire of the Sun*, published by Gollancz in September. His collected non-fiction, *Which Way to Inner Space?* will probably be appearing in 1985.

THE GODS IN FLIGHT

Behind the hotel, the cliffs rose sheer. The steps which had been cut into the rock long ago made their ascent easy. Kilat climbed them slowly, hands on knees, and his small brother Dempo followed, chattering as he went.

At the top of the climb, the boys were confronted by huge stones, fancifully carved in the likenesses of human beings, water buffalo, and elephants, all squatting among the foliage crowning the island. Kilat clapped his hands with pleasure. A hornbill fixed Kilat with its pebble eyes, flapped away, and glided towards the sea. Kilat watched it till it was out of sight, pleased. The bird was popularly supposed to be a messenger from the Upper World, and was associated with the beginnings of mankind.

"That hornbill can be a sign that the world is not destroyed," Kilat told his brother. Dempo tried to climb up a negroid face, planting his bare brown feet on the negroid lips. He still carried baby fat, but Kilat was eight and so lean that his ribs showed.

Kilat stood on the edge of the precipice and stared in a north-easterly direction across the gleaming waters. The sea looked calm from this vantage point, one of the highest on the island; silvery lanes wound across it reflecting the morning sun. Further out, a leaden haze absorbed everything.

Shielding his eyes, Kilat searched in the haze for sight of Kerintji. Generally, the peak was visible, cloud-wreathed, even when the long coast of Sumatra remained hidden. Today, nothing could be seen. Kilat loved Kerintji and thought of it as a god. Sometimes he slept up here under the stars, just to be near Kerintji.

Although he stood for a long time, Kilat saw nothing in the haze. Finally he turned away.

"We'll go down to town now," he called to Dempo. "Kerintji is angry with the behaviour of men."

Still he lingered. It had always been his ambition to get on a ship, or better still, a plane, one of the big white planes which landed on the new airfield, and go north to see the world. Not just the nearby world, but that huge world of affairs where white people travelled about in their white birds as if they were gods. He had already started saving his rupiahs.

The two boys made their way back down the steps. His mother sat on the front steps of her hotel, smoking and chattering to her servants. There were no tourists, no white people, although it was the season for them to arrive, so there was no reason to work.

When Kilat was not made to do small jobs about the hotel, he sold rugs and watches down by the waterfront. Today, it was not worth the effort, but he stuffed some watches in his pocket, just in case.

"You can stay here with me," their mother told the

boys. But they shook their dark heads. It was more interesting down in town, now that they were growing up. Kilat took his brother's hand to show his mother how responsible he was.

The road into town wound round the hill. Going on foot, the boys took a shorter route. They walked down flights of stone steps which, according to legend, the gods had built to allow the first man and woman to climb out of the sea. Every stone was carved; did not steps too have souls, waiting to find expression through the soles of man?

The sun was already hot, but the boys walked in the occasional shade of trees. They had a fine view of the airstrip at one point, stretched like a sticking plaster on one of the few flat areas of the whole of Sipora. All was quiet there. Heat rippled over the runway so that its white lines wriggled like the worms dogs spewed.

"Why aren't the white planes flying?" Dempo asked.

"Perhaps the gods are not coming to Sipora any more."

"You mean the devils. It's better if they don't come, Kilat. No work for you and mother, isn't that a fact?"

"It's better if they come."

"But they spoil our island. Everyone says it."

"Still it's better if they come, Dempo. I can't tell you why but it is."

He knew that it was something to do with that huge world of affairs which began over the horizon. The schoolmistress had said as much.

As they negotiated the next section of stairs, the airport was hidden behind a shoulder of rock. Butterflies sailed between Upper World and Earth. The stairs twisted and they could see the little town, with its two big new hotels which were rivals to his mother's hotel. The Tinggi Tinggi had only six wooden rooms and no air-conditioning. The new hotels were of concrete; one had twelve bedrooms and the other sixteen little bungalows in its grounds. Among the trees behind the bungalows a part of the old village was preserved; its saddle-backed longhouses stood almost on the shore among the palm trees. Their roofs were no longer of thatch but corrugated iron which shone in the sun.

"The old village is excitingly beautiful," Kilat told his brother. He kept some brochures under his mattress which he saved when his mother's tourists threw them away. One of them had described the village—he had asked the schoolmistress what the English words meant—as "excitingly beautiful." It had completely changed Kilat's appreciation of the longhouses. Not that he believed them to be beautiful; he preferred the sixteen little concrete bungalows; but the words had mysteriously distanced him from what had once been familiar. In the photograph in the brochure, the longhouses on their sturdy stilt legs did look excitingly beautiful, as if they no longer formed a part of Sipora.

The steps finished where the slope became easier. Cultivation began immediately. Water buffalo were working in the fields, together with men, women, and some children. A Chinese tea-seller walked along the top of an irrigation dyke, his wares balanced at either end of a pole. Everything looked as normal, except that the tourist stalls which dotted the sides of the sandy road to town were shuttered and padlocked.

"This is where the white gods buy film for their cameras," Kilat said, indicating a stall where a Kodak sign hung. He spoke crisply, with assumed contempt—yet in a curious way he did feel contempt for these rich people who came for a day or two and then disappeared for ever. What were they after? They made so much noise and became angry so easily. They were always in a hurry, although they were supposed to be on a "holiday." It was beyond Kilat to understand what a "holiday" was. The elders said that the tourists from the north came to steal Sipora's happiness.

"They won't need any film now," Dempo said. "Perhaps they have taken enough pictures."

"Perhaps their own gods have stopped them flying in their planes."

They had both watched tourists photographing, jumping up and down and laughing as they watched, to see the way these lumpy people always pointed their cameras at the same things, and the most boring ones. Always the water buffalo, always the longhouses, always the tumbledown coffeshop. Never the sixteen little concrete bungalows or the airport.

In the market square, they met other boys. Dempo played with his friends in a ditch while Kilat talked and joked with his. The weekly boat from Padang should have arrived this morning at nine, but had not done so—Kilat had looked for it from the mountainside, and noted that it was missing. The world was mad. Or possibly it was dead. Just as the gods had created Sipora first, perhaps they had left it till last. Everyone laughed at the idea.

Later, George strolled by, as usual wearing nothing but a pair of rolled-up jeans and a battered hat. He was German or American or something, and he lived in a cheap penguinopon called Rokhandy's Accommodation. George was known locally as The Hippie, but Kilat always called him George. George was about as thin as Kilat.

"I'm heading for the airport, Kilowatt. Like taking my morning constitutional. Want to come along?"

"Kilowatt" was just George's joke—not a bad one either, since Kilat's name meant "lightning." Kilat always enjoyed the joke, and he started walking beside George, hands in pockets, leaving Dempo to look after himself. He took long strides, but George never moved fast. George did not even have a camera.

They skirted the shore, where the wind-surfers lay forlorn with their plastic sails on the sand. Rokhandy himself, bored with the failure of his business, was sailing out on the strait, almost to where the wall of purple cloud began. George waved, but received no response.

"Seems like the good ole Western world has finally

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done itself in for sure. For fifty years they been shaping up for a final shoot-out. There's the lore of the other West, Kilowatt, old son, the one where the cowboys ride the range. Two brave men walking down Main Street in the noonday sun, one playing Goodie, one playing Baddie. They git nearer, and they don't say a thing and they don't change their expressions. And then—bang, bang—the fucking idiots shoot each other dead, 'stead of skedaddling off down a side alley, like what I'd have."

"Were you a cowboy once, Georgie?" Kilat asked. The Hippie went right on with his monologue.

"I feel kind of bad if that's what happened in real life. I'd say our president and their president seen too many them cowboy films, they finally put pride before common horse sense once too often—"n' this time all the bystanders they got themselves killed as well. Serve 'em right trusting the sheriff. So I feel kind of bad, but let me tell you, Kilowatt, old son, I also feel kind of good, because I used to warn 'em and they took not a damned bit of notice, so finally I skedaddled down this here side-alley. And here I still am while bits of them are flying up in the clouds like snow-flakes." He made a noise like a laugh and shook his head.

Some of this Kilat understood. But he was more interested in the lizards climbing over the cowl of the tourists' speedboats, beached like dead sharks. The man who ran the speedboats was sitting in the shade of a tree. He called to Kilat.

"Why don't you take a ride yourself, like Mr Rokhandy's doing?" Kilat asked him. "I'll come with you. I'd like a ride."

"Got no fuel," the man said, shaking his head. "No power. The oil tanker didn't come from Bengkulu this week. Pretty soon, everyone is going to be trouble."

"He's always complaining, that man," Kilat told George, as they walked on.

The haze was creeping over the water from the north, where the sky was a livid purple.

The Hippie said nothing. He kept wiping his face with a dirty rag.

"I'm feeling low. I never trusted no sheriff...Jesus..."

The airport was close now. They had merely to cut through the Holy Grove to reach the broken perimeter fence. But once they were in the shade of the trees, George uttered a sound like a muffled explosion, staggered to a carved stone, and threw himself down on it at full length.

"Rokhandy's wine is really bad," he said. "Not that I complain, and after all Rokky drinks it too, so fair's fair. All the same...Jesus..." He sat up, rolling himself a joint from a purse full of the local ganja. "Suppose those cats have truly done for themselves this time round. Those big political cats..."

Kilat sat and watched him with some concern. There were many things The Hippie did not understand.

"You're sitting on the tomb of King Sidabutar, George. Watch out he does not wake up and grab you! He's still got power, that old man. You're one of his enemies, after all."

"I'm nobody's enemy but my own. Jesus, I love old Sidabutar." George gave a slap to the warm stone on which he sat.

The stone formed the lid of an immense sarcophagus,

shaped somewhat like a primitive boat, terminating in a brutal carved face. The blind eyes of this face gazed towards the new airport and the mountain behind. Other tombs and menhirs stood among the trees. None was so grand as the king's tomb. Yet almost all had been overcome by the spirits of the trees.

These tombs were ancient. Some said they had existed since the dawn of the world. But the story of King Sidabutar was as solid as if itself carved in stone.

The people who lived on Sipora had once been part of a great nation. The nation lived far to the north, even beyond Sumatra, beyond Singapore, away in the Other Hemisphere. The nation had then been prosperous and peaceful; even the poor of the nation lived in palaces and ate off gold plate. So said the legend, so Kilat told it to George.

George had learned patience. He lay on Sidabutar's grave and stared into the shimmering distance.

Powerful enemies came from further north. The nation fought them bravely, and the names of the Twelve Bloody Battles were still recalled. But the nation had to yield to superior numbers. Led by King Sidabutar, it left its homes and moved south in search of peace. Thousands of people, women and children along with the men, deserted their ancestral grounds and fled with their animals and belongings. The cruel invaders from the north pursued them.

There was no safety for them in the south. Wherever the beaten nation went, it was assailed. But the great-hearted king always encouraged his people; by force and guile he persuaded them to remain united against everything. They came at last to the sea. They crossed the sea, thanks to intervention by the gods, and settled in Sumatra, the Isle of Hope. Even in Sumatra, head-hunters and other ferocious tribes made life miserable for the king's people. While some of the nation moved into the forests and mountain ranges of the interior, the king himself, accompanied by the ladies and gentlemen of his court, again crossed over the seas. So he came at last to the peaceful and fruitful island of Sipora.

By this time, King Sidabutar was an old man. Most of his life had been spent on the great journey, whose epic story would never be forgotten on Earth. When he reached the shelter of what is now the Holy Grove, he fell dying. His queen tended him and wept. The old King blessed the land and proclaimed with his dying breath that if the enemies of his people ever landed on Sipora, then he would rise up again in majesty, bringing with him all the Powers of the Upper World in vengeance.

"What a guy to have for a hero!" exclaimed George. He lay smoking his joint and looking up into the branches of the hiarara, or sacred oak. The oak's roots had spread and widened, taking a grip on the king's sarcophagus with arms like veins of petrified lava.

"Sidabutar is the greatest hero in the world," Kilat said. "You ought to get off his grave."

"Sidabutar was a bum, a real bum. One of the defeated. He got his gang kicked out of wherever it was—somewhere up on the borders of China, I guess—and spent his whole life on the run, right? Always heading further south, out of trouble, right? Finally he freaked out

here, on this little dump of an island in the Indian Ocean...Jesus, Kilowatt, that's the story of my life. Do you think some cat's going to be looney enough to raise up a stone tomb for me? No way. Old Sidabutar is just a plain bum, like me. A plain bum."

Kilat jumped up and started pummeling George in the chest. "You bastard. Just because you screw old Rokky's daughter every night, I know. Don't you say a word against our king. Otherwise he will fly right up and destroy you flat, just like America and Russia have been destroyed."

George rolled out of his way and laughed. "Yeah, maybe, maybe—and destroyed for the same good reason. Talking too much. Okay, man, I'll keep my trap shut, and you keep Rokky's daughter out of it, right."

Kilat was not satisfied. He was convinced he could sense King Sidabutar's spirit in the Grove. The curious thing was, he felt the same uncomfortable mixture of admiration and contempt for Sidabutar as he did for the white gods. If they were so clever, how come they ruined everything? If the king was so great, how come he let them ruin everything? They had brought gonorrhea and other diseases to Sipora—the old king did nothing about it.

But he said no more, because Dempo came running through the trees. Between complaints that his big brother had left him, Dempo had a long story to tell about a beruk monkey escaping while climbing a coconut tree.

"Never mind," Kilat told him. "We are going with George to the airport. It's excitingly beautiful."

George nipped out his joint and they made their way through the sacred oaks, each one of which looked sinuous enough to contain a living spirit.

Since there was no traffic, the airport guards had gone home. Nobody was about. They were able to walk right across the runway, across the magic white lines. The asphalt was hot to bare feet. Lizards scuttled away into holes as they went.

In the foyer of the airport building, two rows of floor tiling had been taken up and a trough chiselled in the concrete beneath, deep enough to take a new electric cable. But the cable had not materialised, and the trough lay like a wound across the empty space. Upstairs, a good many locals were gathered, to admire the view, to chat and pass the time. The kiosk was open, selling beer.

In the side window of the kiosk, a two-month-old newspaper had been hung. The paper was yellowing, the edges curling like an old leaf.

Under a headline reading **SUPER POWERS END IT!!!** was a report from Manila, describing how the long-anticipated nuclear war had broken out between the countries of the Warsaw Pact and the NATO Alliance. It was believed that Europe was destroyed. The Soviet Union had also fired its SS20s against China, who had not retaliated. The USA had made a massive retaliation, but was herself destroyed. The entire northern hemisphere was blanketed in radioactive dust-clouds. Manila was suffering. Nobody had any idea how many people had died or were dying. The monsoons were bringing death to India.

George glanced at this document and laughed bitterly. "If the poor old kicked-about planet can fix its

circulation system properly, odds are on staying safe here in the Southern Hemisphere. Just don't let them ship in any of that radiation muck down here."

They talked to a lot of people, but only rumours could pass between them. Some said Australia had been destroyed, some mentioned South Africa. Others said that South Africa was sending hospital teams to Europe. Kilat enjoyed just being in the lounge, with its map of world communications in marquetry on the wall. He felt powerful in the airport. This was the escape route to other lands, if they still existed.

"Will we be wiped out?" Dempo asked. "The white gods hate us, don't they?"

"No, nonsense. We are the lucky ones. The great body of Sumatra lies between us and all that destruction. Kerintji and the other giants will keep infection away from us."

He thought about his watches, and walked among the crowd trying to sell them. Nobody was in the mood for buying. One smartly dressed merchant said, shaking his head, "Watches are no good any more, my son. Time has run out." He looked very sad.

The airport siren sounded. An official in the uniform of Merpati marched into the lounge and addressed them. He held his hands up, palms forward, for silence.

"Attention. We are receiving radio messages from a plane in trouble in the area. We have signalled it to land in Benkulu, but there is trouble in the plane—illness of some sort—and they are running out of fuel. The plane will land here."

A babble of questions greeted the statement. Men pressed forward on the official. He was a middle-aged man with greying hair. He smiled and waved his hands again as he backed away.

"Do not worry. We shall deal with the emergency," His words were drowned by the siren of an ambulance, swinging out of its garage on to the tarmac just beyond the reception lounge. "We ask all those who have no official business here please to quit the airport premises for their own safety. The plane is larger than the types officially designated to land here. We may have a little trouble, since the runway is too short in this instance. Please vacate the premises immediately."

More questions and excitement. The official held his ground and said, "Yes, yes, I understand your worries. No worries if you do not panic. Please evacuate the building peacefully. We understand the plane is American, bringing high-ranking officials from San Diego."

At the word "American," the panic got under way in earnest. Everybody started to run, down the stairs or simply round the lounge.

Kilat grasped Dempo's hand and charged downstairs. They elbowed their way out through the double glass doors. They had lost The Hippie, but Kilat did not care about that. He ran with Dempo, aiming for the airport fence. The fire engine went by. When he looked up, he saw the sky had hazed over. It felt suddenly cold.

Someone whistled. The boys looked and saw George leaning against the open doors of the ambulance garage. He beckoned them over.

They ran to him; he stooped to put his arms around them.

"Sounds like there might be a little excitement. Let's wait here. I want to get a look at these guys

getting off this plane." He stared hard at Kilat, saying, "Heap bad medicine, Kilowatt."

He relit his joint, his soft face unusually grim. Kilat and Dempo squatted in the dust. They could look right across the airport to the Holy Grove, and through the grove to the sea, its surface sullen, no longer glittering.

"To see a plane come in from here will be excitingly beautiful. Have you ever been to San Diego, George?"

"If these cats survived, they have been underground, out of harm's way."

Kilat did not understand, and allowed himself to be cuddled only a minute. But he remained close to George.

After a while, George said, "Listen, Kilowatt, these cats are going to bring trouble. Plenty trouble. If they survived the holocaust and they've grabbed a plane, then they are bigwigs, that's sure. And if they come this far—like why not some place nearer home?—then it figures that some other guys along the way would not let them land, right? I'm telling you, these cats may be loaded with marines and god-knows-what, like bodyguards. They bring trouble."

"They'll—perhaps they'll be grateful to us..."

"Grateful, shit. Cats with guns aren't grateful. They'll be looking for one last shoot-out."

"Maybe it's the President of the United States coming to visit us," Dempo said, hoping for reassurance. He looked frightened and clung to George's leg.

Kilat said in a small voice, "You think they might take Sipora over?"

"Why not? Why the hell not? I know these cats, think they own the world. Maybe your police should gun them all down as they cross the tarmac."

Kilat looked concernedly up into The Hippie's face. He could tell George was frightened. Overhead, engine-roar grew slightly louder. The plane remained hidden in the overcast.

"We've only got six police and they've only got one gun between them. They're just for controlling tourists, that's all."

George looked wildly about. "Maybe the damned bird will crash if the runway's too short. Blow itself up and good riddance. We need those cats here like we need the clap."

Dempo started to jump up and down. "Oh, I hope it crashes! I hope it crashes! That would be really excitingly beautiful."

The airport was now a scene of wild action. Sirens were blaring and people and cars moving about the runways. The island's one police car was trying to hustle them out of the way. Centreline lights came on along the landing strips; high-density approach lights, white touchdown zonelights, winked on. Flags were rushed up masts. More people were running up from the direction of the town.

Suddenly the noise of the plane was louder. The plane emerged from the low cloud. It was enormous, silver, predatory, its under-carriage unfolding. It made the universe vibrate. Anyone sleeping anywhere on the island would have been awakened.

Dempo and Kilat fell over in awe.

The plane came roaring down, aiming straight for the ambulance shed, or so it appeared. Then, with a gust of wind which curled the dust off the airport, it was gone again. They saw its glaring jets

before it vanished back into the cloudcover.

"Oh, it's gone away," cried the boys. "It's gone to Benkulu after all."

All the people out on the airport ground had flung themselves flat. Now they got up and ran for safety, while the cars drove off in all directions, revving their engines and skidding to avoid collision.

"It'll be back," George said. He spat on the ground. "Pilot just took a look. His instruments must be malfunctioning. Who the hell could those guys be up there? Oh, I don't like this, I don't like this one little bit."

"It's the President, I know it," Kilat shouted. He had to shout. The noise was greater. The plane had turned over the strait and was coming in again.

"Run slap into the mountain, you bastard!" George called, raising a fist to the sky. "Leave us in peace."

They saw it then. This time it was much lower, spoilers up, ailerons going down, nose lifting. The undercarriage appeared to brush the tossing palms at the far end of the field. It looked too enormous and fast possibly to stop in the length of the island.

"Crash, you bastard!" George yelled as it rushed by, monstrous, bouncing, jarring. Grit whipped up into their faces. The scream of the tyres hit them. Then it was past.

It was slowing. Only a few hundred yards to go to the far fence. Both the ambulance and the fire engine were roaring along behind it.

The plane juddered as it braked while the fence came nearer. Now it might stop in time. But momentum carried it on. Stones flew.

Still thundering, the silver monster ran over the threshold markings, bumped off the end of the asphalt, and crunched through a row of flashers. The people watching through the wire fence broke and ran.

The machine swerved, rammed a wing against the fencing and ploughed in a leisurely way through the side fence, striking its nose and one engine against palm trees. Part of the undercarriage snapped. The plane sank to one side as if going down on one knee. Smoke, steam and dust covered the scene.

"Jesus," said George.

"Jesus," said the boys in imitation.

The scene seemed to hold as if time had frozen. The diffused sunlight made everything shadowless. Then one of the emergency exits opened in the side of the plane. A yellow escape chute billowed out.

Passengers began to slide down the chute, one every one and a half seconds. They came down like dolls, only returning to life at the bottom as they picked themselves up. The smashed engine was smoking. Suddenly it burst into flame. Flames ran along the wing, rose up over the cockpit. Shouts came from the plane, another exit opened forward of the wing, uniformed men jumped out and fell.

"Wouldn't you know it—soldiers!" yelled George. "The Yanks are coming."

He started hurling abuse at the men lining up beside the yellow chute. They wore battle dress, helmets, and were armed with machine carbines.

The two boys could see that most of the men were in bad condition. Their faces were pale, their hair patchy. Some were bandaged. Some fell to the ground directly they exchanged the air-conditioning of the plane for the muggy atmosphere of Sipora. Although the fire

was gaining hold, and their movements were panicky, the newcomers moved slowly and stiffly.

"They are ill," Kilat said. "They are bringing their diseases here. Let's skedaddle down a side-alley..."

"There ain't no more side-alleys, son."

As the fire-engine drove up, the soldiers stopped it, aiming their weapons at the crew. Black smoke billowed across the tarmac.

Older men were now deplaning. They walked painfully towards the airport buildings. Most of them wore peaked caps with braid, and medal ribbons on their chests. An armed escort fell in and accompanied them, carbines at the ready.

"It's the fucking Chiefs of Staff," George yelled. "Those are the bastards that started this war, and they think they can hide out in some damned bolthole in the Indian Ocean."

"They have the sickness," Kilat called, but George was already running out of the shelter, running across the concrete towards the approaching column of decrepit figures, swerving to avoid the oily smoke.

Kilat saw it happening, saw the muzzles of the guns go up, saw the faces of the soldiers. He never forgot the faces of those soldiers. They tightened their mouths, froze, became expressionless, and fired. Fired at George as he charged towards them, shouting.

The bullets came spanging in the direction of the boys. Kilat pulled Dempo to the floor as one smacked into the back of the garage. When he looked up, George had fallen and was rolling over and over in a curious way, kicking his legs. Then he stopped and lay still.

Even as George ceased to move, another noise added itself to the roar of fire.

It was a quite distinctive sound, like a whistle, like a giant's exhalation. The ground shook with it.

Among the trees opposite where the boys lay, clouds of steam billowed up. They concealed something rising from the earth itself, from a gaping tomb. A great figure grew taller. It came up like a rocket. Its head emerged above the crowns of the trees in the Holy Grove.

Smoke and steam wreathed that countenance like whiskers, but the expression of an anger implacable in intent was clear to see.

King Sidabutar had woken at last from his long sleep. He rose like vengeance, to summon up the Powers of the Upper World. Science was dead: now he was free to wreak destruction on his enemies.

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Brian Aldiss wrote in January that until talking to peace campaigners in West Germany and Greenham Common, "I still managed to believe in the nuclear deterrent. Not without reason, as 20 years of uncertain peace have proved. But now we know too much. The stakes are too high for a gamble on reason alone. Man is not entirely a reasonable creature." (*The Guardian*, 23rd January 1984). "The Gods in Flight" contributes half the title of his forthcoming short story collection, *Seasons in Flight*, due from Jonathan Cape in November. Both gods and seasons are also in flight on the troubled world of *Helliconia*: "If you get God out of the way and set right your relationship to the planet, then personal relationships prosper... Very difficult." Expressionless, a phagor watches as gathering snowclouds dim the suns.

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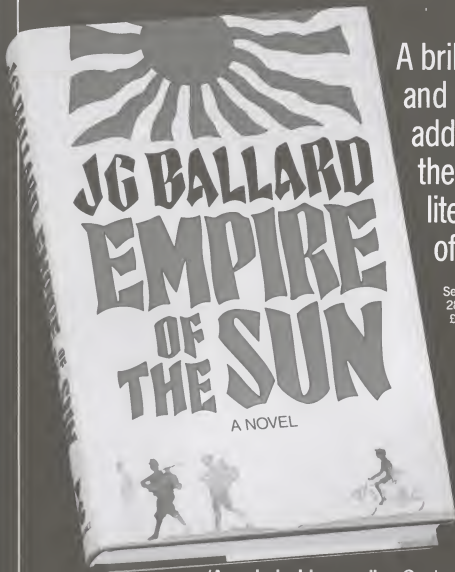
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CANNED GOODS

Thomas M. Disch

In the downstairs lobby Mr Weyman's handgun was taken from him by one of the four uniformed guards and locked in a mailbox. No such requirement was made of his escort, whose name was Lenny. When Lenny followed him into the dark stairwell, Mr Weyman went through a short inward crisis of unreasoning paranoia, followed by an inward sigh of resignation to the dictates of fate, followed by a brief but intense rapture of anger at the way he was being made to cooperate in his own fleecing. It was just as well they'd taken his gun away in the lobby, or he might have done something foolish when he finally got to see this Shroder person.

He must not let himself flare up. Survival was all that mattered. He had survived the winter. Now if he could just last out the spring, the government would surely have found some way by then to restore the city to a semblance of order. The crisis could not just keep going on and on and on. It had to stop, and then things would return to normal.

On the sixth floor landing Mr Weyman was obliged to stop to catch his breath. During the entire long trek downtown his escort had never once offered to help Mr Weyman with his precious parcel in its swaddlings of old clothes and taped and stapled-together shopping bags. Now Mr Weyman's arms and back ached, his sinuses were beginning to pulse ominously, and his lungs were heaving. It wouldn't do to arrive at Shroder's door out-of-breath and beet-red.

"Is it much farther up?"

"Fourteen," replied the ever-laconic Lenny.

Mr Weyman demanded rest stops again on 9 and on 12, and so when Shroder came to the door and asked him in, he was able to respond without major heavings and gaspings. He even had breath to laugh at Shroder's

(and all the world's) little joke about having to complain to the landlord to get the elevator fixed.

Shroder led him into a large drawing room made to seem small with overmuch furniture. Not so much furniture that one was put in mind at once of Noah's ark, but a good deal more (Mr Weyman was certain) than had been here at the start of the crisis. Nor were the walls hung chock-a-block with the choicest of his recent acquisitions, as one might have expected. There was a small flower painting over the mantle (Fantin-Latour?), a vintage Derain between the windows, and, in the place of honour opposite the couch on which Mr Weyman was seated, a large, expensively framed academic nude, reclining her peaches-and-cream buttocks on masses of maroon velvet, all very correct and not a little lubricious.

From Mr Weyman's viewpoint this was not entirely reassuring. That nude, in particular, spoke of a taste that caters to the requirements of Arab oil sheikhs. The Derain, on the other hand, offered some hope. Indeed, despite himself, Mr Weyman could not resist an altogether incongruous twinge of envy. For all that he delighted in the Fauves, he'd never owned a first-rate work by one of them.

"Shall we," said Shroder, "get right to business?"

"By all means." Mr Weyman began undoing the swaddlings of his parcel.

"I hope you won't mind if Lenny puts this on videotape. I should like to have evidence that our transaction has been entered into, on both sides, freely and without constraint. Should there ever be any question."

"I quite understand, and I'm scarcely in a position to object. Indeed, I'm grateful to be allowed to come here

and for the escort your friend provided. No one likes to carry large parcels about on the street these days. Though if I knew I were going to be on camera, I might have dressed with a little more care."

"Oh, we all must wear camouflage on the streets these days. This is the era, necessarily, of inconspicuous consumption."

Mr Weyman placed his first offering on the low table before the couch.

"Ah-ha!" said Shroder, making no effort to disguise his pleasure. "Fiske Boyd, and a good one. Though, of course, for a woodcut there's an obvious limit to what I can offer."

Mr Weyman regarded the Boyd woodcut with a regretful love admixed with some vanity. It represented an arrangement of canned goods on a tabletop, very spare, very assured. He had bought it in '88 when Boyd's reputation, and his prices, were already on the rise. His prices since had peaked, but never declined, and Mr Weyman could congratulate himself (in this instance) on his acumen as an investor.

"It's chiefly for his woodcuts that Boyd's admired," Mr Weyman pointed out with the confidence that comes of having the judgment of the market behind one.

"Yes, of course. I only meant that there's a limit to what I can afford to offer for even the finest woodcut. What is the date, by the way?"

"1930." There was no need to add that it was in miraculously mint condition.

"Yes. Well..." Shroder nodded significantly towards the shopping bag, as much as to say, "Let's move along."

Shyly, with a sense almost of exposing himself, Mr Weyman took out what he regarded as his trump card—a large, chastely-framed Motherwell collage/drawing.

Shroder formed his lips into an O of disappointment.

"I realise, of course, that Motherwell no longer commands the prices he once did."

Shroder emitted a derisive snort, like the erasure of a laugh. "Indeed! In that respect Motherwell remains at the forefront of the avant-garde."

"You're speaking of what happened to the six paintings in the Elegy series at the Black Saturday auction? If the gallery had been allowed to put floors on the prices—"

"If pigs could fly! There was no one buying abstract expressionism at that point but museums and investors. Once the museums started unloading, you don't think the investors wouldn't follow suit, do you?"

Mr Weyman looked down at his Motherwell sadly. Only four years ago he'd bought it from a friend in dire circumstances for \$200. The friend had paid several thousand dollars for it in the late '60s.

"I was there that day," Mr Weyman said. "Were you?"

"On Black Saturday? Hardly. I would have been eleven years old."

"It's something I'll never forget. I remember how I lusted after those Motherwells. But by the time they'd come under the hammer I'd already emptied my own bank account, and the Zurich gallery I was acting for wasn't touching anything that went under an artist's established price level by more than 50%. I remember

the silences that day. They'd halve a price, and halve it again, and still no one would bid. A Poons for twelve hundred. Well, perhaps that's not unthinkable. Tastes change, and if one paints on such an institutional scale, and institutions decide to stop investing in art, what's to be done? But a Braque for seven hundred? Braque?"

"Mr Weyman, may I remind you, that it's not Braque's merits at issue here, but Motherwell's."

"Excuse me. I'm in no position to argue. But I must at least be allowed to point out that this drawing was hung at the '65 retrospective at the Modern."

"I don't care if it hung at the Louvre next to the Mona Lisa. It is my long-standing opinion that Motherwell was never anything more than the favourite tailor of a very naked emperor. Any third year art student with savvy coaching from a competent interior decorator could produce such wallpaper by the roll. The days are gone when a painter can claim a day's wages for two minutes' work, because he's spent a lifetime refining his taste. I'm sorry, Mr Whistler, but art is not p.r. Sorry to you too, Mr Motherwell, but this sort of thing—" He tapped the scrap of a Gauloise pack that lent its little note of colour to the drawing. "—just won't do. Not in the 21st century."

"Well, if you don't want it," Mr Weyman said with a resentment he was unable to conceal, "you needn't take it. I have faith that Motherwell's day will return. I am sorry for your sake that you do not."

"As to my taking it, Mr Weyman, I have a fixed policy, as I believe our mutual friend at Sotheby's explained to you: I buy by the lot. My overhead costs don't allow me the luxury of haggling. Now...let's see what else you have."

Mr Weyman removed the Burchfield canvas from his shopping bag, which, no longer braced by the painting's stretcher, flopped sideways to the carpet (a very choice Sarouk in a floral design).

"Ah. This is more like it!"

Shroder took the Burchfield in his hands and turned it at different angles to the light, as though studying the facets of a gemstone. It was a painting of a Christmas tree, but a Christmas tree seen in its eternal aspect, each light aureoled and the several aureoles overlapping and interweaving in an elaborate seine of interference patterns. The paint seemed to tremble like tinsel on a tree.

"This," said Shroder reverently, "cannot be easy to part with. I'll give you the best price I can. Let me think. For the Fiske Boyd I'll give you, let's say an even ten cans of tuna? No, it's in mint condition; let's make it a round dozen. For the Motherwell—a pound of elbow macaroni. Which is more than it's worth. For the Burchfield—"

He took the small canvas to the window and basked in the glow of its beauty. "For the Burchfield I shall let Lenny take you into the stockroom, and you may fill up one plastic carrier bag with whatever you fancy, excepting only the caviar. There's a limit of three jars per customer on that."

"That's very good of you, Mr Shroder. Very generous, indeed. Thank you." Mr Weyman reached for the handles of his shopping bag.

"One moment, Mr Weyman. I seem to remember that our friend said you would be bringing me four

pieces to consider."

"Yes...but the fourth is just...a bagatelle. A frippery. Nothing more than a serigraph. If I'd had a better sense, beforehand, of your preferences I'd never have brought it."

"But you have brought it—I see the end of the cardboard tube poking out of your bag. And you've roused my curiosity with what you say. I must remind you that I buy only by the lot."

Reluctantly Mr Weyman took the cardboard tube from the recumbent shopping bag, undid the knots of the plastic strip that bound the print to the tube, and unrolled the print. He'd bought the print in the first days after the collapse of the market for what he'd then considered a song—considering its sales history. It had been a very famous work of art in its day.

Shroder crowed with pleasure. "Oh, Mr Weyman! How droll! And of course I have just the thing to give you in exchange. The perfect barter."

He went into his stockroom and returned with a can of Campbell's Tomato Soup.

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Thomas M. Disch last contributed to *Interzone* in our second issue with "Cantata '82", an ode on the death of Philip K. Dick. His latest book of poetry *Here I Am, There You Are, Where Were We?* was published earlier this year by Hutchinson, and his new novel *The Businessman: A Tale of Terror* by Cape in Britain and Harper & Row in America. Tom Disch must be the only living human being to have written a libretto for *Frankenstein* and a script for a computer-interactive novel.

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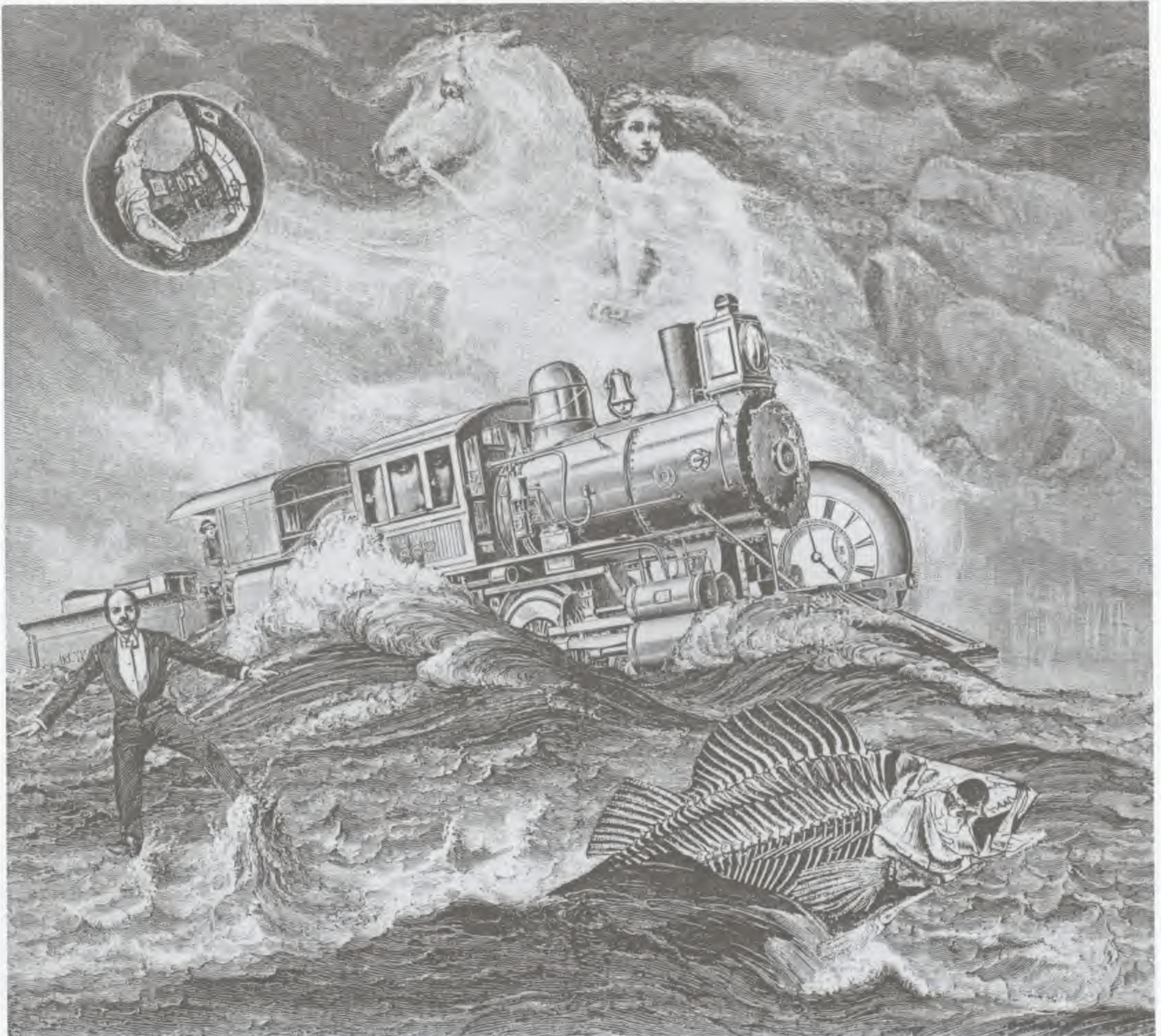
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Synaptic Intrigue

Richard Kadrey

Richard Kadrey writes:

I was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1957 and spent my first ten years there. The next ten years I spent trying to get away from Houston, Texas.

At various times I have worked on loading docks and warehouses, been a newspaper writer, performed stand-up comedy, sold jokes to comedians and magazines and have written for Saturday morning kiddie cartoons. I've had a long and successful career as a failed musician and after six months of unemployment last year, I presently find myself working as a technical writer for a computer software company. No, I do not know anything about computers.

I have been writing fiction for several years and my artwork is an outgrowth of that. I experimented with cut-ups after reading an interview with William Burroughs and that eventually led me to collages. I am very interested in depicting the landscape of dreams, finding that place where the irrational becomes concrete

and whole. Most of my artwork is an attempt to capture ciphers of personal mythology, the symbols of which make little sense to the rational mind, but which resonate strongly in the subconscious.

At the moment, I live in a monstrous Victorian flat in San Francisco with a musician and another writer. I have completed one novel which I am in the process of abandoning.

My pet peeves are late buses and germ warfare. My favourite colour is bilious.

1. The Entropy Express

2. Here We Are Again, Washed Up on Amanda's Shore

3. The Origins of the Impulse

4. Picnic in Altoona





3



4

THE LUCK IN THE HEAD

M. John Harrison

Uroconium, Ardwick Crome said, was for all its beauty an indifferent city. Its people loved the arena, they were burning or quartering somebody every night for political or religious crimes. They hadn't much time for anything else. From where he lived, at the top of a tenement on the outskirts of Montrouge, you could often see the fireworks in the dark, or hear the shouts on the wind.

He had two rooms. In one of them was an iron-framed bed with a few blankets on it, pushed up against a washstand he rarely used. Generally he ate his meals cold, though he had once tried to cook an egg by lighting a newspaper under it. He had a chair; and a tall white ewer with a picture of the courtyard of an inn on it. The other room, a small northlight studio once occupied—so tradition in the Artists Quarter had it—by Kristodulos Fleece the painter, he kept shut. It had some of his books in it, also the clothes in which he had first come to Uroconium and which he had thought then were fashionable.

He was not a well-known poet, although he had his following.

Every morning he would write for perhaps two hours, first restricting himself to the bed by means of three broad leather straps which his father had given him and which he fastened himself, at the ankles, the hips, and finally across his chest. The sense of unfair confinement or punishment induced by this, he found, helped him to think.

Sometimes he called out or struggled; often he lay quite inert and looked dumbly up at the ceiling. He had been born in those vast dull ploughlands which roll east from Soubridge into the Midland Levels like a chocolate coloured sea, and his most consistent work came from the attempt to retrieve and order the customs and events of his childhood there: the burial of the "Holly Man" on Plough Monday, the sound of the hard black lupin seeds popping and tapping against the window in August while his mother sang quietly in the kitchen the ancient carols of the Oei'l

Voirrey. He remembered the meadows and reeds beside the Yser Canal; the fishes that moved within it. When his straps chafed, the old bridges were in front of him, made of warm red brick and curved protectively over their own image in the water!

Thus Crome lived in Uroconium, remembering, working, publishing. He sometimes spent an evening in the Bistro Californium or the Luitpold Cafe. Several of the Luitpold critics (notably Barzelletta Angst, who in *L'Espace Cromien* ignored entirely the conventional chronology—expressed in the idea of "recherche"—of Crome's long poem *Bream Into Man*) tried to represent his work as a series of narrativeless images, glued together only by his artistic persona. Crome refuted them in a pamphlet. He was content.

Despite his sedentary habit he was a sound sleeper. But before it blows at night over the pointed roofs of Montrouge, the south-west wind must first pass between the abandoned towers of the Old City, as silent as burnt logs, full of birds, scraps of machinery, and broken-up philosophies; and Crome had hardly been there three years when he began to have a dream in which he was watching the ceremony called "the Luck in the Head."

For its proper performance this ceremony requires the construction on a sea shore, between the low and high tide marks at the Eve of Assumption, of two fences or "hedges." These are made by weaving osiers—usually cut at first light on the same day—through split hawthorn uprights upon which the foliage has been left. The men of the town stand at one end of the corridor thus formed; the women, their thumbs tied together behind their backs, at the other. At a signal the men release between the hedges a lamb decorated with medallions, paper ribbons and strips of rag. The women race after, catch it, and scramble to keep it from one another, the winner being the one who can seize the back of the animal's neck with her teeth. In Dunham Massey, Lymm and Iron Chine, the lamb is

paraded for three days on a pole before being made into pies; and it is good luck to obtain the pie made from the head.

In his dream Crome found himself standing on some sand dunes, looking out over the wastes of marram grass at the osier-fences and the tide. The women, with their small heads and long grey garments, stood breathing heavily like horses; or walked nervously in circles avoiding one another's eyes as they tested with surreptitious tugs the red cord which bound their thumbs. Crome could see no-one there he knew. Somebody said, "A hundred eggs and a calf's tail," and laughed. Ribbons fluttered in the cold air: they had introduced the lamb. It stood quite still until the women, who had been lined up and settled down after a certain amount of jostling, rushed at it. Their shrieks rose up like those of herring gulls, and a fine rain came in from the sea.

"They're killing one another!" Crome heard himself say.

Without any warning one of them burst out of the melee with the lamb in her teeth. She ran up the dunes with a floundering, splay-footed gait and dropped it at his feet. He stared down at it.

"It's not mine," he said. But everyone else had walked away.

He woke up listening to the wind and staring at the washstand; got out of bed and walked round the room to quieten himself down. Fireworks, greenish and queasy with the hour of the night, lit up the air intermittently above the distant arena. Some of this illumination, entering through the skylight, fell as a pale wash on his thin arms and legs, fixing them in attitudes of despair.

If he went to sleep again he often found, in a second lobe or episode of the dream, that he had already accepted the dead lamb and was himself running with it, at a steady premeditated trot, down the landward side of the dunes towards the town. (This he recognised by its slate roofs as Lowick, a place he had once visited in childhood. In its streets some men made tiny by distance were banging on the doors with sticks, as they had done then. He remembered very clearly the piece of singed sheepskin they had been making people smell.) Empty ground stretched away on either side of him under a motionless sky; everything—the clumps of thistles, the frieze of small thorn trees deformed by the wind, the sky itself—had a brownish cast, as if seen through an atmosphere of tars. He could hear the woman behind him to begin with, but soon he was left alone. In the end Lowick vanished too, though he began to run as quickly as he could, and left him in a mist of smoke through which a bright light struck, only to be diffused immediately.

By then the lamb had become something that produced a thick buzzing noise, a vibration which, percolating up the bones of his arm and into his shoulder, then into the right side of his neck and face where it reduced the muscles to water, made him feel nauseated, weak and deeply afraid. Whatever it was he couldn't shake it off his hand.

Clearly—in that city and at that age of the world—it would have been safer for Crome to look inside himself for the source of this dream. Instead, after he had woken one day with the early light coming

through the shutters like sour milk and a vague rheumatic ache in his neck, he went out into Uroconium to pursue it. He was sure he would recognise the woman if he saw her; or the lamb.

She was not in the Bistrot Californium, when he went there by way of the Via Varese, or in Mecklenburgh Square. He looked for her in Proton Alley, where the beggars gaze back at you empty and the pavement artists offer to draw for you, in that curious mixture of powdered chalk and condensed milk they favour, pictures of the Lamia, without clothes or without skin; with fewer limbs or organs than normal, or more. They couldn't draw the woman he wanted. On the Unter-Main-Kai (it was eight in the morning and the naphtha flares had grown smoky and dim) a boy spun and tottered among the crowds from the arena, declaiming in a language no-one knew. He uncovered his cropped head, raised his bony face to the sky. He croaked, and stuck long thorns in his own throat: at this the women rushed up to him and thrust upon him cakes, cosmetic emeralds, coins. Crome studied their faces: nothing. In the Luitpold Cafe he found Ansel Verdigris and some others eating gooseberries steeped in gin.

"I am cold and sick," said Verdigris, clutching Crome's hand.

He spooned up a few more gooseberries and then, letting the spoon fall back into the dish with a clatter, rested his head on the tablecloth beside it. From this position he was forced to stare up sideways at Crome and talk with one side of his mouth. The skin beneath his eyes had the shine of wet pipe clay; his coxcomb of reddish-yellow hair hung damp and awry; the electric light, falling oblique and bluish across his white triangular face, lent it an expression of astonishment.

"My brain is poisoned with disease, Crome," he said, "and my heart is foul. We'll go, we two, into the hills, and throw snow at one another."

He looked round with contempt at his friends. Gunter Verlac and the Baron de V———, who grinned sheepishly back.

"Look at them!" he said. "Crome, we're the only human beings here. We'll renew our purity! We'll dance and play on the lips of the icy gorges!"

"It's the wrong season for snow," said Crome.

"Well then," Verdigris whispered, "let's go where the old machines leak and flicker, and you can hear the calls of the madmen from the asylum up at Wergs. Listen—"

"No!" said Crome. He wrenched his hand away.

"Listen, proctors are out after me from Cheminor to Mynned! Lend me some money, Crome, I'm sick of my crimes. Last night they shadowed me along the cinder paths among the poplar trees by the isolation hospital."

He laughed, and began to eat gooseberries as fast as he could.

"The dead remember only the streets, never the numbers of the houses!"

Verdigris lived with his widowed mother, a woman of some means and education who called herself Madame "L.", in Delpine Square. She was in a condition of perpetual tender anxiety about his health and he about hers. They lay ill with shallow fevers and deep cafards, in rooms with connecting doors so that they could keep up each other's spirits in the wearisome sleepless afternoons; when they felt a little better they would have themselves pushed side by side in

wheelchairs through the gardens of the Haadenbosk, from gallery to museum, from this saloon to that, making gay little jokes as they went. Once a month Verdigris would leave her and spend all night at the arena with some prostitute; fall unconscious in the Luitpold or the Californium; and wake up distraught a few hours later in his own bed. His greatest fear was that he would catch syphilis. Crome looked down at him.

"You've never been to Cheminor, Verdigris," he said. "Neither of us have."

Verdigris stared at the tablecloth. Suddenly he stuffed it into his mouth—his empty dish fell on to the floor where it rolled about for a moment, faster and faster, and was smashed—only to throw back his head and pull it out again, inch by inch, like a medium pulling out ectoplasm in Margery Fry Court.

"You won't be so pleased with yourself," he said, "when you've read this."

And he gave Crome a thick green paper, folded three times, on which someone had written:

"A man may have many kinds of dreams. There are dreams he wishes to continue and others he does not. At one hour of the night men may have dreams in which everything is veiled in violet; at others, unpalatable truths may be conveyed. If a certain man wants certain dreams he may be having to cease, he will wait by the Aqualate Pond at night, and speak to whoever he finds there."

"This means nothing to me," lied Crome. "Where did you get it?"

"A woman thrust it into my hand two days ago as I came down the Ghibbeline Stair. She spoke your name, or one like it. I saw nothing."

Crome stared at the sheet of paper in his hand. Leaving the Luitpold Cafe a few minutes later, he heard someone say: "In Aachen, by the Haunted Gate—do you remember?—a woman on the pavement stuffing cakes into her mouth? Sugar cakes into her mouth?"

That night, as Crome made his way reluctantly towards the Aqualate Pond, the moonlight rose like a lemon yellow tide over the blackened towers and empty cat-infested palaces of the city; in the Artists Quarter the violin and cor anglais pronounced their fitful whine; while from the distant arena—from twenty-five thousand faces underlit by the flames of the auto da fe—issued an interminable whisper of laughter.

It was the anniversary of the liberation of Uroconium from the Analeptic Kings.

Householders lined the steep hill up at Alves. Great velvet banners, stitched with black crosses on a red and white ground, hung down from the balconies above their naked heads. Their eyes were patiently fixed on the cracked copper dome of the observatory at its summit. (There, as the text sometimes called "The Earl of Rone" remembers, the Kings handed over to Mammy Vooley and her fighters their weapons of appalling power; there they were made to bend the knee.) A single bell rang out then stopped—A hundred children carrying candles swept silently down towards them and were gone!—Others came on behind, shuffling to the rhythms of the "Ou lou lou" that ancient song. In the middle of it all, the night and the banners and the lights, swaying precariously to and fro fifteen

feet above the procession like a doll nailed on a gilded chair, came Mammy Vooley herself.

Sometimes as it blows across the Great Brown Waste in summer, the wind will uncover a bit of petrified wood. What oak or mountain ash this wood has come from, alive immeasurably long ago, what secret treaties were made beneath it during the Afternoon of the world only to be broken by the Evening, we do not know. We will never know. It is a kind of wood full of contradictory grains and lines: studded with functionless knots: hard.

Mammy Vooley's head had the shape and the shiny grey look of wood like that. It was provided with one good eye, as if at some time it had grown round a glass marble streaked with milky blue. She bobbed it stiffly right and left to the crowds: who stood to watch her approach; knelt as she passed; and stood up again behind her. Her bearers grunted patiently under the weight of the pole that bore her up. As they brought her slowly closer it could be seen that her dress—so curved between her bony, strangely-articulated knees that dead leaves, lumps of plaster and crusts of wholemeal bread had gathered in her lap—was russet-orange; and that she wore askew on the top of her head a hank of faded purple hair, wispy and fine like a very old woman's. Mammy Vooley, celebrating with black banners and young women chanting; Mammy Vooley, Queen of Uroconium, Moderator of the city, as silent as a log of wood.

Crome got up on tiptoe to watch. He had never seen her before. As she drew level with him she seemed to float in the air, her shadow projected on a cloud of candle-smoke by the lemon yellow moon. That afternoon, for the ceremony, in her salle or retiring room (where at night she might be heard singing to herself in different voices), they had painted on her face another one—approximate, like a doll's, with pink cheeks. All round Crome's feet the householders of Alves knelt in the gutter. He stared at them. Mammy Vooley caught him standing.

She waved down at her bearers.

"Stop!" she whispered.

"I bless all my subjects," she told the kneeling crowd. "Even this one."

And she allowed her head to fall exhaustedly on one side.

In a moment she had passed by. The remains of the procession followed her, trailing its smell of burnt wick and sweating feet, and with a dying cry in the distance vanished round a corner towards Montrouge. (Young men and women fought for the privilege of carrying the Queen. As the new bearers tried to take it from the old ones, Mammy Vooley's pole swung backwards and forwards in uncontrollable arcs so that she flopped about in her chair at the top of it like the head of a mop. Wrestling silently, the small figures carried her away.) In the streets below Alves there was a sense of relief: smiling and chatting and remarking how well the Mammy had looked that day, the householders took down the banners and folded them in tissue paper.

"....so regal in her new dress."

"So clean...."

"....and such a healthy colour!"

But Crome continued to look down the street for a long time after it was empty. Marguerite petals had fallen among the splashes of candle grease on the

cobbled setts. He couldn't think how they came to be there. He picked some up in his hand and raised them to his face. A vivid recollection came to him of the smell of flowering privet in the suburbs of Soubridge when he was a boy; the late snapdragons and nasturtiums in the gardens. Suddenly he shrugged. He got directions to the narrow lane which would take him west of Alves to the Aqualate Pond, and having found it walked up it rapidly. Fireworks burst from the arena, fizzing and flashing directly overhead; the walls of the houses danced and warped in the warm red light; his own shadow followed him along them, huge, mis-shapen, intermittent.

Crome shivered. "Whatever is in the Aqualate Pond," Ingo Lympamy the dramatist had once told him, "It's not water."

On the shore in front of a terrace of small shabby houses he had already found a kind of gibbet made of two great arched, bleached bones. From it hung a corpse whose sex he couldn't determine, upright in a tight wicker basket which creaked in the wind. The pond lay as still as Lympamy had predicted, and it smelled of lead.

"Again, you see, everyone agrees it's a small pool, a very small one. But when you are standing by it, on the Henrietta Street side, you would swear that it stretched right off to the horizon. The winds there seem to have come such a distance. Because of this the people in Henrietta Street believe they are living by an ocean, and make all the observances fishermen make. For instance they say that a man can only die when the pool is ebbing. His bed must be oriented the same way as the floorboards, and at the moment of death doors and windows should be opened, mirrors covered with a clean white cloth and all fires extinguished. And so on."

They believed too, at least the older ones did, that huge fish had once lived there.

"There are no tides of course, and fish of any kind are rarely found there now. All the same, in Henrietta Street once a year they bring out a large stuffed pike, freshly varnished and with a bouquet of thistles in its mouth, and walk up and down the causeway with it, singing and shouting.

"And then—it's so hard to explain!—echoes go out over that stuff in the pool whenever you move, especially in the evening when the city is quiet: echoes and echoes of echoes, as though it were contained in some huge vacant metal building. But when you look up there is only the sky."

"Well Lympamy," said Crome aloud to himself. "You were right."

He yawned. Whistling thinly and flapping his arms against his sides to keep warm, he paced to and fro underneath the gibbet. When he stood on the meagre strip of pebbles at its edge, a chill seemed to seep out of the pool and into his bones. Behind him Henrietta Street stretched away, lugubrious and pot-holed. He promised himself, as he had done several times that night, that if he turned round, and looked down it, and still saw no-one, he would go home. Afterwards he could never quite describe to himself what he had seen.

Fireworks flickered for a moment in the dark, like the tremulous reflections made by a bath of water on the walls and ceilings of an empty room, and were gone. While they lasted Henrietta Street was all boarded-up windows and bluish shadows. He had the impression that as he turned it had just been vacated by a number of energetic figures—quiet, agile men who dodged into dark corners or flung themselves over the rotting fences and iron railings, or simply ran off very fast down the middle of the road precisely so that he shouldn't see them. At the same time he saw, or thought he saw, one real figure do all these things, as if it had been left behind by the rest, staring white-faced over its shoulder at him in total silence as it sprinted erratically from one feeble refuge to another, and then vanishing abruptly between some houses.

Overlaid, as it were, on both this action and the potential or completed action it suggested, was a woman in a brown cloak. At first she was tiny and distant, trudging up Henrietta Street towards him; then, without any transitional state at all, she had appeared in the middle ground, posed like a piece of statuary between the puddles, white and naked with one arm held up (behind her it was possible to glimpse for an instant three other women, but not to see what they were doing—except that they seemed to be plaiting flowers); finally, with appalling suddenness, she filled his whole field of vision, as if on the Unter-Main-Kai a passer-by had leapt in front of him without warning and screamed in his face. He gave a violent start and jumped backwards so quickly that he fell over. By the time he was able to get up the sky was dark again, Henrietta Street empty, everything as it had been.

The woman, though, awaited him silently in the shadows beneath the gibbet, wrapped in her cloak like a sculpture wrapped in brown paper, and wearing over her head a complicated mask made of wafery metal to represent the head of one or another wasteland insect. Crome found that he had bitten his tongue. He approached her cautiously, holding out in front of him at arm's length the paper Verdigris had given him.

"Did you send me this?" he said.

"Yes."

"Do I know you?"

"No."

"What must I do to stop these dreams?"

She laughed. Echoes fled away over the Aqualate Pond.

"Kill the Mammy," she said.

Crome looked at her.

"You must be mad," he said. "Whoever you are."

"Wait," she recommended him, "and we'll see who's mad."

She lowered the corpse in its wicker cage—the chains and pulleys of the gibbet gave a rusty creak—and pulled it towards her by its feet. Momentarily it escaped her and danced in a circle, coy and sad. She recaptured it with a murmur. "Hush now. Hush." Crome backed away. "Look," he whispered, "I—" Before he could say anything else she had slipped her hand deftly between the osiers and, like a woman gutting fish on a cold Wednesday morning at Lowth, opened the corpse from diaphragm to groin. "Man or woman?" she asked him, up to her elbows in it. "Which would you say?" A filthy smell filled the air and then dissipated. "I don't

want—" said Crome. But she had already turned back to him and was offering him her hands, cupped, in a way that gave him no option but to see what she had found—or made—for him.

"Look!"

A dumb, doughy shape writhed and fought against itself on her palms, swelling quickly from the size of a dried pea to that of a newly-born dog. It was, he saw, contained by vague and curious lights which came and went; then by a cream-coloured fog which was perhaps only a blurring of its own spatial limits; and at last by a damp membrane, pink and grey, which it burst suddenly by butting and lunging. It was the lamb he had seen in his dreams, shivering and bleating and tottering in its struggle to stand, the eyes fixed on him forever in its complaisant, bone-white face. It seemed already to be sickening in the cold leaden breath of the Pond.

"Kill the Mammy," said the woman with the insect's head, "and in a few days' time you will be free. I will bring you a weapon soon."

"All right," said Crome.

He turned and ran.

He heard the lamb bleating after him the length of Henrietta Street: and behind that the sound of the sea, rolling and grinding the great stones in the tide.

For some days this image preoccupied him. The lamb made its way without fuss into his waking life. Wherever he looked he thought he saw it looking back at him: from an upper window in the Artists Quarter, or framed by the dusty iron railings which line the streets there, or from between the chestnut trees in an empty park.

Isolated in a way he had not been since he first arrived in Uroconium wearing his green plush country waistcoat and yellow pointed shoes, he decided to tell no-one what had happened by the Aqualate Pond. Then he thought he would tell Ansel Verdigris and Ingo Lympany. But Lympany had gone to Cladich to escape his creditors—and Verdigris, who after eating the tablecloth was no longer welcomed at the Luitpold Cafe, had left the Quarter too: at the large old house in Delpine Square there was only his mother—a bit lonely in her bath chair, though still a striking woman with a great curved nose and a faint, heady smell of elder blossom—who said vaguely, "I'm sure I can remember what he said," but in the end could not.

"I wonder if you know, Ardwick Crome, how I worry about his bowels," she went on. "As his friend you must worry too, for they are very lazy, and he will not encourage them if we do not!"

It was, she said, a family failing.

She offered Crome chamomile tea, which he refused, and then got him to run an errand for her to a fashionable chemist's in Mynned. After that he could do nothing but go home and wait.

Kristodulos Fleece—half dead with opium and syphilis, and notoriously self-critical—had left behind him when he vacated the northlight studio a small picture. Traditionally it remained there. Succeeding occupants had taken heart from its technical brio and uncustomary good humour (although Audsley King was reputed to have turned it to the wall during her brief period in Montrouge because she detected in it some unforgiveable sentimentality or other) and no

dealer in the Quarter would buy it for fear of bad luck. Crome now removed it to the corner above the cheap tin washstand so that he could see it from his bed.

Oil on canvas, about a foot square, it depicted in some detail a scene the artist had called "Children Beloved of the Gods Have the Power to Weep Roses." The children, mainly girls, were seen dancing under an elder tree, the leafless branches of which had been decorated with strips of rag. Behind them stretched away rough common land, with clumps of gorse and a few bare, graceful birch saplings, to where the upper windows and thatch of a low cottage could be made out. The light-hearted vigour of the dancers, who were winding themselves round the tallest girl in a spiral like a clock spring, was contrasted with the stillness of the late winter afternoon, its sharp clear airs and horizontal light. Crome had often watched this dance as a boy, though he had never been allowed to take part in it. He remembered the tranquil shadows on the grass, the chant, the rose and green colours of the sky. As soon as the dancers had wound the spiral tight they would begin to tread on one another's toes, laughing and shrieking—or, changing to a different tune, jump up and down beneath the tree while one of them shouted, "A bundle of rags!"

It was perhaps as sentimental a picture as Audsley King had claimed. But Crome, who saw a lamb in every corner, had never seen one there; and when she came as she had promised, the woman with the insect's head found him gazing so quietly up at it from the trapezium of moonlight falling across his bed that he looked like the effigy on a tomb. She stood in the doorway, perhaps thinking he had died and escaped her.

"I can't undo myself," he said.

The mask glittered faintly. Did he hear her breathing beneath it? Before he could make up his mind there was a scuffling on the stairs behind her and she turned away to say something he couldn't quite catch—though it might have been: "Don't come in yourself."

"These straps are so old," he explained. "My father—"

"All right, give it to me then," she said impatiently to whoever was outside. "Now go away." And she shut the door. Footsteps went down the stairs; it was so quiet in Montrouge that you could hear them clearly going away down flight after flight, scraping in the dust on a landing, catching in the cracked linoleum. The street door opened and closed. She waited, leaning against the door, until they had gone off down the empty pavements towards Mynned and the Ghibbeline Passage, then said, "I had better untie you." But instead she walked over to the end of Crome's bed, and sitting on it with her back to him stared thoughtfully at the picture of the elder-tree dance.

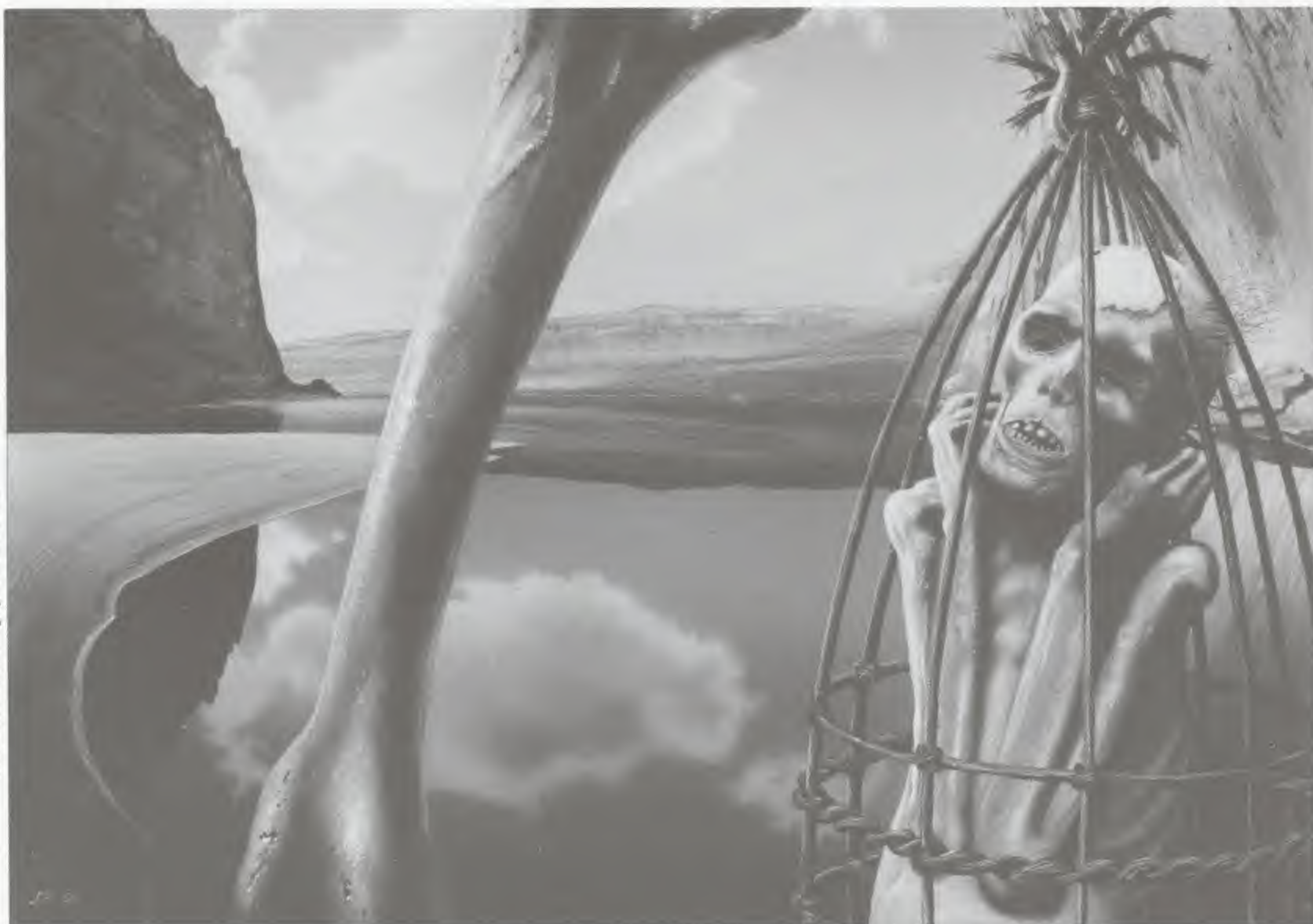
"You were clever to find this," she told him. She stood up again, and, peering at it, ignored him when he said,

"It was in the other room when I came."

"I suppose someone helped you," she said. "Well, it won't matter." Suddenly she demanded, "Do you like it here among the rats? Why must you live here?"

He was puzzled.

"I don't know."



A shout went up in the distance, long and whispering like a deeply-drawn breath. Roman candles sailed up into the night one after the other, exploding in the east below the zenith so that the collapsing pantile roofs of Montrouge stood out sharp and black. Light poured in, ran off the back of the chair and along the belly of the enamel jug, and, discovering a book or a box here, a broken pencil there, threw them into merciless relief. Yellow or gold, ruby, greenish-white: with each new pulse the angles of the room grew more equivocal.

"Oh, it is the stadium!" cried the woman with the insect's head. "They have begun early tonight!"

She laughed and clapped her hands. Crome stared at her.

"Clowns will be capering in the great light!" she said.

Quickly she undid his straps.

"Look!"

Propped up against the whitewashed wall by the door she had left a long brown paper parcel hastily tied with string. Fat or grease had escaped from it, and it looked as if it might contain a fish. While she fetched it for him, Crome sat on the edge of the bed with his elbows on his knees, rubbing his face. She carried it hieratically, across her outstretched arms, her image advancing and receding in the intermittent light.

"I want you to see clearly what we are going to lend you."

When the fireworks had stopped at last, an ancient ceramic sheath came out of the paper. It was about two feet long, and it had been in the ground for a long

time, yellowing to the colour of ivory and collecting a craquelure of fine lines like an old sink. Chemicals seeping through the soils of the Great Waste had left here and there on it faint blue stains. The weapon it contained had a matching hilt—although by now it was a much darker colour from years of handling—and from the juncture of the two had leaked some greenish, jelly-like substance which the woman with the insect's head was careful not to touch. She knelt on the bare floorboards at Crome's feet, her back and shoulders curved round the weapon, and slowly pulled hilt and sheath apart.

At once a smell filled the room, thick and stale like wet ashes in a dustbin. Pallid oval motes of light, some the size of a birch leaf, others hardly visible, drifted up towards the ceiling. They congregated in corners and did not disperse; while the weapon, buzzing torpidly, drew a dull violet line after it in the gloom as the woman with the insect's head moved it slowly to and fro in front of her. She seemed to be fascinated by it. Like all those things it had been dug up out of some pit. It had come to the city through the Analeptic Kings, how long ago no-one knew. Crome pulled his legs up on to the bed out of its way.

"I don't want that," he said.

"Take it!"

"No."

"You don't understand. She is trying to change the name of the city!"

"I don't want it. I don't care."

"Take it. Touch it. It's yours now."

"No!"

"Very well," she said quietly. "But don't imagine

the painting will help you again." She threw it on the bed near him. "Look at it," she said. She laughed disgustedly. "'Children Beloved of the Gods!'" she said. "Is that why he waited for them outside the wash-houses twice a week?"

The dance was much as it had been, but now with the fading light the dancers had removed themselves to the garden of the cottage, where they seemed frozen and awkward, as if they could only imitate the gaiety they had previously felt. They were dancing in the shadow of the bredogue which someone had thrust out of an open window beneath the earth-coloured eaves. In Soubridge, and in the midlands generally, they make this pitiful thing—with its bottle-glass eyes and crepe paper harness—out of the stripped and varnished skull of a horse, put up on a pole covered with an ordinary sheet. This one, though, had the skull of a well-grown lamb, which seemed to move as Crome looked.

"What have you done?" he whispered. "Where is the picture as it used to be?"

The lamb gaped its lower jaw slackly over the unsuspecting children to vomit on them its bad luck. Then, clothed with flesh again, it turned its white and pleading face on Crome, who groaned and threw the painting across the room and held out his hand.

"Give me the sword from under the ground then," he said.

When the hilt of it touched his hand he felt a faint sickly shock. The bones of his arm turned to jelly and the rank smell of ashpits enfolded him. It was the smell of a continent of wet cinders, buzzing with huge papery-winged flies under a poisonous brown sky; the smell of Cheminor, and Mammy Vooley, and the Aqualate Pond; it was the smell of the endless wastes which surround Uroconium and everything else that is left of the world. The woman with the insect's head looked at him with satisfaction. A knock came at the door.

"Go away!" she shouted. "You will ruin everything!"

"I'm to see that he's touched it," said a muffled voice. "I'm to make sure of that before I go back."

She shrugged impatiently and opened the door.

"Be quick then," she said.

In came Ansel Verdigris, stinking of lemon genever and wearing an extraordinary yellow satin shirt which made his face look like a corpse's. His coxcomb, freshly dyed that afternoon at some barber's in the Tinmarket, stuck up from his scalp in exotic scarlet spikes and feathers. Ignoring Crome, and giving the woman with the insect's head only the briefest of placatory nods, he made a great show of looking for the weapon. He sniffed the air. He picked up the discarded sheath and sniffed that. (He licked his finger and went to touch the stuff that had leaked from it, but at the last moment he changed his mind.) He stared up at the vagrant motes of light in the corners of the room, as if he could divine something from the way they wobbled and bobbed against the ceiling.

When he came to the bed he looked intently but with no sign of recognition into Crome's face.

"Oh yes," he said. "He's touched it all right."

He laughed. He tapped the side of his nose, and winked. Then he ran round and round the room crowing like a cock, his mouth gaping open and his tongue extended, until he fell over Kristodulos Fleece's paint-

ing, which lay against the skirting board where Crome had flung it. "Oh, he's touched it all right," he said, leaning exhaustedly against the door frame. He held the picture away from him at arm's length and looked at it with his head on one side. "Anyone could see that." His expression became pensive. "Anyone."

"The sword is in his hand," said the woman with the insect's head. "If you can tell us only what we see already, get out."

"It isn't you that wants to know," Verdigris answered flatly, as if he was thinking of something else. He propped the painting up against his thigh and passed the fingers of both hands several times rapidly through his hair. All at once he went and stood in the middle of the room on one leg, from which position he grinned at her insolently and began to sing in a thin musical treble like a boy at a feast:

I choose you one, I choose you all,

I pray I might go to the ball.

"Get out!" she shouted.

"The ball is mine," sang Verdigris,

and none of yours,

Go to the woods and gather flowers.

Cats and kittens abide within

But we court ladies walk out and in!

Some innuendo in the last line seemed to enrage her. She clenched her fists and brought them up to the sides of the mask, the feathery antennae of which quivered and trembled like a wasp's.

"Sting me!" taunted Verdigris. "Go on!"

She shuddered.

He tucked the painting under his arm and prepared to leave.

"Wait!" begged Crome, who had watched them with growing puzzlement and horror. "Verdigris, you must know that it is me! Why aren't you saying anything? What's happening?"

Verdigris, already in the doorway, turned round and gazed at Crome for a moment with an expression almost benign; then, curling his upper lip, he mimicked contemptuously, "'Verdigris, you've never been to Cheminor. Neither of us have'." He spat on the floor and touched the phlegm he had produced with his toe, eyeing it with qualified disapproval. "Well I have now, Crome. I have now." Crome saw that under their film of triumph his eyes were full of fear; his footsteps echoed down into the street and off into the ringing spaces of Montrouge and the Old City.

"Give the weapon to me," said the woman with the insect's head. As she put it back in its sheath it gave out briefly the smells of rust, decaying horse hair, vegetable water. She seemed indecisive. "He won't come back," she said once more. "I promise." But Crome would not look away from the wall. She went here and there in the room, blowing dust off a pile of books and reading a line or two in one of them, opening the door into the northlight studio then closing it again immediately, tapping her fingers on the edge of the washstand. "I'm sorry about the painting," she said. Crome could think of nothing to say to that. The floorboards creaked; the bed moved. When he opened his eyes she was lying next to him.

All the rest of the night her strange long body moved over him in the unsteady illumination from the skylight. The insect mask hung above him like a question, with its huge faceted eyes and its jaws of filigree steel

plate. He heard her breath in it, distinctly, and once thought he saw through it parts of her real face, pale lips, a cheekbone, an ordinary human eye; but he would not speak to her.

The outer passages of the observatory at Alves are full of an ancient grief. The light falls as if it has been strained through muslin. The air is cold and moves unpredictably. It is the grief of the old machines which, unfulfilled, whisper suddenly to themselves and are silent again for a century. No-one knows what to do with them. No-one knows how to assuage them. A faint sour panic seems to cling to them: they laugh as you go past, or extend a curious yellow film of light like a wing.

"Ou lou lou" sounds from these passages almost daily—more or less distant with each current of air—for Mammy Vooley is often here. No-one knows why. It is clear that she herself is uncertain. If it is pride in her victory over the Analeptic Kings, why does she sit alone in an alcove, staring out of the windows? The Mammy who comes here to brood is not the doll-like figure which processes the city on Fridays and holidays. She will not wear her wig, or let them make up her face. She is a constant trial to them. She sings quietly and tunelessly to herself, and the plaster falls from the damp ceilings into her lap. A dead mouse has now come to rest there and she will allow no-one to remove it.

At the back of the observatory, the hill of Alves continues to rise a little. This knoll of ancient compacted rubbish, excavated into caves, mean dwellings and cemeteries, is called Antedaraus because it drops away sheer into the Daraus Gorge. Behind it, on the western side of the gorge (which from above can be seen to divide Uroconium like a fissure in a wart), rise the ruinous towers of the Old City. Perhaps a dozen of them still stand, mysterious with spires and fluted mouldings and glazed blue tiles, among the blackened hulks of those that fell during the City Wars. Every few minutes one or another of them sounds a bell, the feathery appeal of which fills the night from the streets below Alves to the shore of the Aqualate Pond, from Montrouge to the arena: in consequence the whole of Uroconium seems silent and tenantless—empty, littered, obscure, a city of expired fanaticisms.

Mammy Vooley hasn't time for those old towers, or for the mountains which rise beyond them to throw a shadow ten miles long across the bleak watershed and shallow boggy valleys outside the city. It is the decayed terraces of the Antedaraus that preoccupy her. They are overgrown with mutant ivy and stifled whins; along them groups of mourners go, laden with anemones for the graves. Sour earth spills from the burst revetments between the beggars' houses, full of the rubbish of generations and strewn with dark red petals which give forth a sad odour in the rain. All day long the lines of women pass up and down the hill. They have with them the corpse of a baby in a box covered with flowers; behind them comes a boy dragging a coffin lid; they gossip endlessly. Mammy Vooley nods and smiles.

Everything her subjects do here is of interest to her: on the same evening that Crome found himself outside the observatory—fearfully clutching under his coat the weapon from the waste—she sat in the pervasive

gloom somewhere in the corridors, listening with tilted head and lively eyes to a hoarse muted voice calling out from under the Antedaraus. After a few minutes a man came out of a hole in the ground and with a great effort began pulling himself about in the sodden vegetation, dragging behind him a wicker basket of earth and excrement. He had, she saw, no legs. When he was forced to rest, he looked vacantly into the air; the rain fell into his face but he didn't seem to notice it. He called out again. There was no answer. Eventually he emptied the basket and crawled back into the ground.

"Ah!" whispered Mammy Vooley, and sat forward expectantly.

She was already late; but she waved her attendants away when for the third time they brought her the wig and the wooden crown.

"Was it necessary to come here so publicly?" muttered Crome.

The woman with the insect's head was silent. When that morning he had asked her, "Where would you go if you could leave this city?" she had answered, "On a ship." And, when he stared at her, added, "In the night. I would find my father."

But now she only said,

"Hush. Hush now. You will not be here long."

A crowd had been gathering all afternoon by the wide steps of the observatory. Ever since Mammy Vooley's arrival in the city it had been the custom for a group of young boys to dance on these steps on a certain day in November, in front of the gaunt wooden images of the Analeptic Kings. Everything was ready. Candles thickened the air with the smell of fat. The kings had been brought out, and now loomed inert in the gathering darkness, their immense defaced heads lumpish and threatening. The choir could be heard from inside the observatory, practising and coughing, practising and coughing, under that dull cracked dome which absorbs every echo like felt. The little boys—they were seven or eight years old—huddled together on the seeping stones, pale and grave in their outlandish costumes. They were coughing, too, in the dampness that creeps down every winter from the Antedaraus.

"The weapon is making me ill," said Crome. "What must I do? Where is she?"

"Hush."

At last the dancers were allowed to take their places about halfway up the steps, where they stood in a line looking nervously at one another until the music signalled them to begin. The choir was marshalled, and sang its famous "Renunciative" cantos, above which rose the whine of the cor anglais and the thudding of a large flat drum. The little boys revolved slowly in simple, strict figures, with expressions inturned and languid. For every two paces forward, it had been decreed, they must take two back.

Soon Mammy Vooley was pushed into view at the top of the steps, in a chair with four iron wheels. Her head lolled against its curved back. Attendants surrounded her immediately, young men and women in stiff embroidered robes who after a perfunctory bow set about ordering her wisp of hair or arranging her feet on a padded stool. They held a huge book up in front of her single milky eye; and then placed in her



lap the crown or wreath of woven yew twigs which she would later throw to the dancing boys. Throughout the dance she stared uninterestedly up into the sky, but as soon as it was finished and they had helped her to sit up she proclaimed in a distant yet eager voice:

"Even these were humbled."

She made them open the book in front of her again, at a different page. She had brought it with her from the north.

"Even these kings were made to bend the knee," she read.

The crowd cheered.

She was unable after all to throw the wreath, although her hands picked disconnectedly at it for some seconds. In the end it was enough for her to let it slip out of her lap and fall among the boys, who scrambled with solemn faces down the observatory steps after it while her attendants showered them with crystallised geranium petals and other coloured sweets, and in the crowd their parents urged them, "Quick now!"

The rain came on in earnest, putting out some of the candles; the wreath rolled about on the bottom step like a coin set spinning on a table in the Luitpold Cafe, then toppled over and was still. The quickest boy claimed it, Mammy Vooley's head had fallen to one side again, and they were preparing to close the great doors behind her, when shouting and commotion broke out in the observatory itself and a preposterous figure in a yellow satin shirt burst on to the steps near her chair. It was Ansel Verdigris. He had spewed blackcurrant gin down his chest and his coxcomb, now dishevelled and lax, was plastered across

his sweating forehead like a smear of blood. He still clutched under one arm the painting he had taken from Crome's room: this he began to wave about in the air above his head with both hands, so strenuously that the frame broke and the canvas flapped loose from it.

"Wait!" he shouted.

The woman with the insect's head gave a great sideways jump of surprise, like a horse. She stared at Verdigris for a second as if she didn't know what to do, then pushed Crome in the back with the flat of her hand.

"Now!" she hissed urgently. "Go and kill her now or it will be too late!"

"What?" said Crome.

As he fumbled at the hilt of the weapon, poison seemed to flow up his arm and into his neck. Whitish motes leaked out of the front of his coat and, stinking of the ashpit, wobbled heavily past his face up into the damp air. The people nearest him moved away sharply, their expressions puzzled and nervous.

"Plotters are abroad," Ansel Verdigris was shouting, "in this very crowd!"

He looked for some confirmation from the inert figure of Mammy Vooley, but she ignored him and only gazed exhaustedly into space while the rain turned the breadcrumbs in her lap to paste. He squealed with terror and threw the painting on the floor.

"People stared at this picture," he said. He kicked it. "They knelt in front of it. They have dug up an old weapon and wait now to kill the Mammy!"

He sobbed. He caught sight of Crome.

"Him!" he shouted. "There! There!"

"What has he done?" whispered Crome.

He dragged the sword out from under his coat and threw away its sheath. The crowd fell back immediately, some of them gasping and retching at its smell. Crome ran up the steps holding it out awkwardly in front of him, and hit Ansel Verdigris on the head with it. Buzzing dully, it cut down through the front of Verdigris's skull, then, deflected by the bridge of his nose, skidded off the bony orbit of the eye and hacked into his shoulder. His knees buckled and his arm on that side fell off. He went to pick it up and then changed his mind, glaring angrily at Crome instead and working the glistening white bones of his jaw. "Bugger," he said. "Ur." He marched unsteadily about at the top of the steps, laughing and pointing at his own head.

"I wanted this," he said thickly to the crowd. "It's just what I wanted!" Eventually he stumbled over the painting, fell down the steps with his remaining arm swinging out loosely, and was still.

Crome turned round and tried to hit Mammy Vooley with the weapon, but he found that it had gone out like a wet firework. Only the ceramic hilt was left—blackened, stinking of fish, giving out a few grey motes which moved around feebly and soon died. When he saw this he was so relieved that he sat down. An enormous tiredness seemed to have settled in the back of his neck. Realising that they were safe, Mammy Vooley's attendants rushed out of the observatory and dragged him to his feet again. One of the first to reach him was the woman with the insect's head.

"I suppose I'll be sent to the arena now," he said.

"I'm sorry."

He shrugged.

"The thing seems to be stuck to my hand," he told her. "Do you know anything about it? How to get it off?"

But it was his hand, he found, that was at fault. It had swollen into a thick clubbed mass the colour of over-cooked mutton, in which the hilt of the weapon was now embedded. He could just see part of it protruding. If he shook his arm, waves of numbness came up it; it did no good anyway, he couldn't let go.

"I hated my rooms," he said. "But I wish I was back in them now."

"I was betrayed too, you know," she said.

Later, while two women supported her head, Mammy Vooley peered into Crome's face as if trying to remember where she had seen him before. She was trembling, he noticed, with fear or rage. Her eye was filmed and watery, and a smell of stale food came up out of her lap. He expected her to say something to him, but she only looked; and after a short time signed to the women to push her away. "I forgive all my subjects," she announced to the crowd. "Even this one." As an afterthought she added, "Good news! Henceforth this city will be called Vira Co, 'the City in the Waste'." Then she had the choir brought forward. As he was led away Crome heard it strike up "ou lou lou" that ancient song:

Ou lou lou lou

Ou lou lou

Ou lou lou lou

Ou lou lou

Ou lou lou lou

Lou Lou lou lou

Ou lou lou lou

Lou

Lou

Lou

Soon the crowd was singing too.

M. John Harrison began to detail the cheerful folklore of Viriconium and environs in "Strange Great Sins", published in our fifth issue. "Lords of Misrule", another tale about the Mari Lwyd, the little hump-backed hobby horse with its lacquered skull and implacable eyes, features in *Sovoy Dreams*, the new bumper fun album from Savoy Books. Harrison's stories continue as potent as they are rare. "Older Women", appearing in the March 1984 number of *Woman's Journal*, was a surprise but no exception. ("A woman came out of the house, tugged the lid off a dustbin and stared uncomprehendingly into it for a few seconds before going back in.") "The Luck in the Head" will be part of his next collection, *Viriconium Nights*, due out in America later this year. His most recent novel, *In Viriconium* (US title: *The Flooding Gods*) was runner-up for the 1982 Guerdon Fiction Prize.

SUBMIT YOUR STORIES TO INTERZONE

We welcome submissions from unknown and little-known writers. All manuscripts will be read sympathetically, but it would be helpful if you bear in mind the following points:

1. Read the magazine before you submit anything to us. Judge the standard of the material we are already publishing, and see if you can do as well—or better.

2. All stories should be typed, on one side of the paper only, preferably on white A4 paper, and must be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope of good size.

3. Please type your name and address, and the word-length of the story, on the top sheet of the manuscript.

4. The preferred length is 2,000 to 8,000 words. We rarely publish longer stories, and the few that we do accept have to

be outstandingly good to justify their length.

5. Please submit stories one at a time. We've been surprised at the number of people who send us batches of three or four. Simply select your best story and let us see it.

6. Remember that *Interzone* is edited and published by an unpaid collective. We are doing what we are doing for the love of it. We pay for the fiction we publish, but all payments have to come from the proceeds of the magazine. We hope therefore that all aspiring writers will do what they can to support *Interzone*—by taking out a subscription and by persuading friends to subscribe. If we fail to sell enough copies there is little hope of us buying any of your stories in the future!

fragments of a hologram r*se

William Gibson

That summer Parker had trouble sleeping. There were power-droughts; sudden failures of the delta-inducer brought painfully abrupt returns to consciousness.

To avoid these, he used patchcords, miniature alligator clips, and black tape to wire the inducer to a battery-operated ASP deck. Power-loss in the inducer would trigger the deck's playback circuit.

He bought an ASP cassette which began with the subject asleep on a quiet beach. It had been recorded by a young blonde yogi with 20-20 vision and an abnormally acute colour-sense. The boy had been flown to Barbados for the sole purpose of taking a nap and his morning's exercise on a brilliant stretch of private beach. The microfiche-laminate in the cassette's transparent case explained that the yogi could will himself through alpha to delta without an inducer. Parker, who hadn't been able to sleep without an inducer for two years, wondered if this was possible.

He had only been able to sit through the whole thing once, though by now he knew every sensation of the first five subjective minutes. He thought the most interesting part of the sequence was a slight editing slip at the start of the elaborate breathing routine: a swift glance down the white beach that picked out the figure of a guard patrolling a chain-link fence, a black machine-pistol slung over his arm.

While Parker slept, power drained from the city's grids.

The transition from delta to delta-ASP was a dark implosion into other flesh. Familiarity cushioned the shock. He felt the cool sand under his shoulders. The cuffs of his tattered jeans flapped against his bare ankles in the morning breeze. Soon the boy would wake fully and begin his Ardha-Matsyendra-something; with other hands Parker groped in darkness for the ASP deck.

Three in the morning. Making yourself a cup of coffee in the dark, using a flashlight when you pour the boiling water.

Morning's recorded dream, fading: through other eyes, dark plume of a Cuban freighter—fading with the horizon it navigates across the mind's grey screen.

Three in the morning.

Let yesterday arrange itself around you in flat schematic images. What you said—what she said—watching her pack—dialling the cab. However you shuffle them they form the same printed circuit, hieroglyphs converging on a central component: you, standing in the rain, screaming at the cabby.

The rain was sour and acid, nearly the colour of piss. The cabby called you an asshole; you still had to pay twice the fare. She had three pieces of luggage. In his respirator and goggles, the man looked like an ant. He pedalled away in the rain. She didn't look back.

The last you saw of her was a giant ant, giving you the finger.

Parker saw his first ASP unit in a Texas shantytown called Judy's Jungle. It was a massive console cased in cheap plastic chrome. A ten-dollar bill fed into the slot bought you five minutes of free-fall gymnastics in a Swiss orbital spa, trampolining through twenty-metre perihelions with a sixteen-year-old VOGUE model—heady stuff for the Jungle, where it was simpler to buy a gun than a hot bath.

He was in New York with forged papers a year later, when two leading firms had the first portable decks in major department stores in time for Christmas. The ASP porn theatres that had boomed briefly in California never recovered.

Holography went too, and the block-wide Fuller domes that had been the holo temples of Parker's childhood became multi-level supermarkets, or housed dusty amusement arcades where you still might find the old consoles, under faded neon pulsing APPARENT

SENSORY PERCEPTION through a blue haze of cigarette smoke.

Now Parker is thirty and writes continuity for broadcast ASP, programming the eye-movements of the industry's human cameras.

The brown-out continues.

In the bedroom, Parker prods the brushed-aluminum face of his Sendai Sleep-Master. Its pilot light flickers, then lapses into darkness. Coffee in hand, he crosses the carpet to the closet she emptied the day before. The flashlight's beam probes the bare shelves for evidence of love, finding a broken leather sandal-strap, an ASP cassette, and a postcard. The postcard is a white light reflection hologram of a rose.

At the kitchen sink, he feeds the sandal-strap to the disposal unit. Sluggish in the brown-out, it complains, but swallows and digests. Holding it carefully between thumb and forefinger, he lowers the hologram toward the hidden rotating jaws. The unit emits a thin scream as steel teeth slash laminated plastic and the rose is shredded into a thousand fragments.

Later he sits on the unmade bed, smoking. Her cassette is in the deck ready for playback. Some women's tapes disorient him, but he doubts this is the reason he now hesitates to start the machine.

Roughly a quarter of all ASP users are unable to comfortably assimilate the subjective body-picture of the opposite sex. Over the years some broadcast ASP stars have become increasingly androgynous in an attempt to capture this segment of the audience.

But Angela's own tapes have never intimidated him before. (But what if she has recorded a lover?) No, that can't be it—it's simply that the cassette is an entirely unknown quantity.

When Parker was fifteen, his parents indentured him to the American subsidiary of a Japanese plastics combine. At the time, he felt fortunate; the ratio of applicants to indentured trainees was enormous. For three years he lived with his cadre in a dormitory, singing the company hymns in formation each morning and usually managing to go over the compound fence at least once a month for girls or the holodrome.

The indenture would have terminated on his twentieth birthday, leaving him eligible for full employee status. A week before his nineteenth birthday, with two stolen credit cards and a change of clothes, he went over the fence for the last time. He arrived in California three days before the chaotic New Secessionist regime collapsed. In San Francisco, warring splinter groups hit and ran in the streets. One or another of four different "provisional" city governments had done such an efficient job of stockpiling food that almost none was available at street level.

Parker spent the last night of the revolution in a burned-out Tucson suburb, making love to a thin teenager from New Jersey who explained the finer points of her horoscope between bouts of almost silent weeping that seemed to have nothing at all to do with anything he did or said.

Years later he realised that he no longer had any idea of his original motive in breaking his indenture.

The first three quarters of the cassette have been erased; you punch yourself fast-forward through a static haze of wiped tape, where taste and scent blur into a single channel. The audio input is white sound—the no-sound of the first dark sea.... (Prolonged input from wiped tape can induce hypnagogic hallucination).

Parker crouched in the roadside New Mexico brush at midnight, watching a tank burn on the highway. Flame lit the broken white line he had followed from Tucson. The explosion had been visible two miles away, a white sheet of heat lightning that had turned the pale branches of a bare tree against the night sky into a photographic negative of themselves: carbon branches against magnesium sky.

Many of the refugees were armed.

Texas owed the shanty-towns that steamed in the warm Gulf rains to the uneasy neutrality she had maintained in the face of the Coast's attempted secession.

The towns were built of plywood, cardboard, plastic sheets that billowed in the wind, and the bodies of dead vehicles. They had names like Jump City and Sugaree, and loosely defined governments and territories that shifted constantly in the covert winds of a black market economy.

Federal and state troops sent in to sweep the outlaw towns seldom found anything. But after each search, a few men would fail to report back. Some had sold their weapons and burned their uniforms, and others had come too close to the contraband they had been sent to find.

After three months, Parker wanted out, but goods were the only safe passage through the Army cordons. His chance came only by accident: late one afternoon, skirting the pall of greasy cooking-smoke that hung low over the jungle, he stumbled and nearly fell on the body of a woman in a dry creek bed. Flies rose up in an angry cloud, then settled again, ignoring him. She had a leather jacket, and at night Parker was usually cold. He began to search the creek bed for a length of brushwood.

In the jacket's back, just below her left shoulderblade, was a round hole that would have admitted the shaft of a pencil. The jacket's lining had been red once, but now it was black, stiff and shining with dried blood. With the jacket swaying on the end of his stick, he went looking for water.

He never washed the jacket; in its left pocket he found nearly an ounce of cocaine, carefully wrapped in plastic and transparent surgical tape. The right pocket held fifteen ampules of Megacillin-D and a ten-inch horn-handled switchblade. The antibiotic was worth twice its weight in cocaine.

He drove the knife hilt-deep into a rotten stump passed over by the jungle's wood-gatherers and hung the jacket there, the flies circling it as he walked away.

That night, in a bar with a corrugated iron roof, waiting for one of the "lawyers" who worked passages through the cordon, he tried his first ASP machine. It was huge, all chrome and neon, and the owner was very proud of it; he had helped hijack the truck himself.

If the chaos of the nineties reflects a radical shift in the paradigms of visual literacy, the final shift away from the Lascaux/Gutenberg tradition of a pre-holographic society,

what should we expect from this newer technology, with its promise of discrete encoding and subsequent reconstruction of the full range of sensory perception?

— Roebuck and Pierhal, *Recent American History: A Systems View*.

Fast-forward through the humming no-time of wiped tape—
—into her body. European sunlight. Streets of a strange city.

Athens. Greek-letter signs and the smell of dust...
—and the smell of dust.

Look through her eyes (thinking, this woman hasn't met you yet; you're hardly out of Texas) at the grey monument, horses there in stone, where pigeons whirl up and circle—

—and static takes love's body, wipes it clean and grey. Waves of white sound break along a beach that isn't there. And the tape ends.

The inducer's light is burning now.

Parker lies in darkness, recalling the thousand fragments of the hologram rose. A hologram has this quality: recovered and illuminated, each fragment will reveal the whole image of the rose. Falling toward delta, he sees himself the rose, each of his scattered fragments revealing a whole he'll never know—stolen credit cards—a burned-out suburb—planetary conjunctions of a stranger—a tank burning on a highway—a flat packet of drugs—a switchblade honed on concrete, thin as pain.

Thinking: we're each other's fragments, and was it always this way? That instant of a European trip, deserted in the grey sea of wiped tape—is she closer now, or more real, for his having been there?

She had helped him get his papers, found him his first job in ASP. Was that their history? No, history was the black face of the delta-inducer, the empty closet, and the unmade bed. History was his loathing

for the perfect body he woke in if the juice dropped, his fury at the pedal-cab driver, and her refusal to look back through the contaminated rain.

But each fragment reveals the rose from a different angle, he remembered, but delta swept over him before he could ask himself what that might mean.

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William Gibson's first novel, *Neuromancer*, appears from Gollancz at around the same time as this issue of IZ. It was published recently in the United States by Ace Books in their new series of "Specials," and it is sure to be a leading contender for next year's sf awards. He has contributed several short stories to *Omni*, some of which have been reprinted by Terry Carr in the *Best SF of the Year*, anthologies. The above piece, which appeared in *Uneath* magazine in 1977, was his first published work. Indeed, in Mr Gibson's own words, it was "the first piece of fiction I ever managed to finish, ever."

It is not our normal policy to print material which has already been published, but we decided to make a rare exception in this case. *Uneath* was a short-lived American magazine of low circulation, and the chances are that most of our readers never saw it. William Gibson is going to be a big name in the sf of the 1980s, so we are pleased to have an opportunity to present his debut story to a new readership. We hope to bring you some brand-new stories by him in the coming years.

He says of himself: "I was born in Conway, South Carolina, in 1948. I spent the bulk of my childhood in one or another decaying Southern backwater, and my late teens and early twenties elsewhere, largely in a polypharmic daze. Never quite managed to become formally a draft-dodger, although I did spend a couple of precarious years in Canada as an illegal immigrant. Turned up in many of the required odd places (Ibiza, Istanbul, Hydra) before settling in Vancouver—as a very legal immigrant, thanks—with my Canadian wife and semi-Canadian children. Currently at work on *Count Zero*, a not-quite-sequel to *Neuromancer*, and *The Log of the Mustang Sally*, unrelated sf, both to be published in England by Gollancz."

BACK ISSUES

Back issues of *Interzone* from No. 1 (Spring 1982) are still available from 21 The Village Street, Leeds, LS4 2PR — although supplies of some numbers are now running low. They are £1.50 each, but readers who buy three or more issues may have them at £1.25 each. (£1.75 each overseas, or £1.50 each for three.) Please make your cheques or postal orders payable to *Interzone*. Contents of back issues:

IZ 1 — M. John Harrison, John Sladek, Angela Carter, Keith Roberts, Michael Moorcock

IZ 2 — J.G. Ballard, Alex Stewart, Andrew Weiner, Rachel Pollack, Thomas M. Disch

IZ 3 — Garry Kilworth, Angela Carter, Josephine Saxton, Nicholas Allan, David S. Garnett

IZ 4 — John Sladek, Alex Stewart, David Redd, Malcolm Edwards, Andy Soutter, Barrington J. Bayley

IZ 5 — Scott Bradfield, Richard Cowper, John Crowley, John Shirley, M. John Harrison

IZ 6 — Cherry Wilder, Neil Ferguson, John Hendry, Lorraine Sintetos, Keith Roberts, plus illustrated feature by Roger Dean.

IZ 7 — Geoff Ryman, Bruce Sterling, Michael Blumlein, plus "comic strip" by Margaret Welbank.

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Spiral winds

Garry Kilworth

There must be the hawk with defective eye-sight. There must be the Bedu tribesman who is not a crackshot; whose family is resigned to meals without meat. There must be the Ethiopian who cannot run; the clumsy mountain goat; the pigeon without a sense of direction. There must be these misfits that fail to reach the common standard of their kind. I was such a creature—a poet without the gift of fine words—a man born to a love of poetry which could not be satisfied by merely reading the works of others but had to have some definite connection with the art.

I finally resigned myself to the fact that I would never write any great verse. At times I had thought that I was close to those lines. Times when I woke in the middle of the night with the faint hum of something on the edge of my brain, which, once pen and paper were to hand, eluded me and left me weeping in frustration. I had been in places—climbing a mountain; running for a bus; entertaining a lovely woman—when inspiration came upon me, sometimes like an exotic snake, sliding into my consciousness; sometimes as a beautiful bull that thundered upon my sensibility and stood there, snorting white plumes and defying captivity. Yet, when the first opportunity to put those thoughts, those dreams into words was available, they fled from me, never to be recovered. The poem was destined to be always just out of my grasp and I was getting older. The days were greyer and shorter than they used to be and time was slipping through my fingers faster than a dying affair.

Consequently, when I heard of the man, I felt that there, there was my last chance to achieve immortality through my one and only love, through poetry. Admittedly, it was to be a compromise—my fame would be established through the discovery of another poet, yet the sponsor can achieve almost as much recognition as the artist if handled carefully. I had reached an age where time had blunted the edge on my pride with its swift succession of yearly blows. I needed a strong connection with the art to satisfy my yearning, my

longing to become part of it. To have ignored the opportunity would have been to condemn myself to an unfulfilled life, a life not without purpose but without the least taste of success. I would have died empty with nothing but a gravestone to mark my passing through the temporal zone. It was Carey, the soldier-of-fortune, the adventurer, who gave me the first clue.

I was sitting in the corner of a pub that stands close to London Bridge, where pseudo-literary types gather seeking company in their own kind, when Carey entered with a young lady he introduced as his niece. She left us almost immediately to join some rather loud friends imitating peacocks in both dress and manner. Carey bought me a drink and I asked him where he had been. Carey was always just back from somewhere.

"The Hadhramaut, old chap. Been looking at some interesting caves there with a friend." He saw my frown and added, "South Yemen desert."

"What sort of caves?" I asked, simply for the sake of conversation. "I mean, was your interest archaeological, geological or anthropological?"

He gave me a sort of half-smile. "One of those...there were some paintings which might have been interesting. Turned out that they were of more recent origin than I had hoped. However...can't win 'em all. What about you? Still running that magazine for little old ladies with a literary bent? Poetry, isn't it?"

I ignored the apparent sneer. "No. I gave it up three months ago. I had hoped to discover some hitherto hidden star, as they say, but as you imply, the contributors were lacking in that vital ingredient—talent."

"Pity. Great pity. What about your own work?"

I glared hard at the table, declining to answer and after a while, Carey took the hint and stopped staring at my hairline. We sat in an uncomfortable silence for a time then Carey said abruptly, "I might have something for you." He reached into his pocket and produced a piece of folded paper.

"What is it?" I asked, leaving the paper where it lay, amongst the beer slops on the table.

He reached across with one hand and opened it. I could see about six-and-a-half lines of writing in what appeared to be Arabic. Beneath these lines was a pencilled translation.

"Well?" I said.

"Found it written in charcoal, on a cave wall. The rains were due and as the place was deep in a Wadi, there was the possibility—well, certainty—that this would have been washed away with the flood. I thought of you and your tireless search for poetic talent. This looks like a fragment of something..."

I snatched it up and read the lines.

"Are you serious?" I said, after a while.

"Perfectly. I read Arabic, you see. That's my translation. Someone with more feel for the thing could do a better job, I've no doubt. God knows I haven't any pretensions..."

"I know. You once sent me a poem for my magazine. You called yourself Sybil Smith."

He laughed at that, making heads turn and me feel foolish. The blond hair flopped over the handsome face almost obscuring his blue eyes. Carey had everything he needed for his chosen role in life—everything the potential adventurer needed—good looks, contacts, a private income, a fine physique, courage, audacity, mental alertness, a touch of aristocracy—everything. It was sickening.

"All right," I said, "it wasn't that funny. Jameson told me it was you—after I'd made a fool of myself. How do I know this isn't a hoax?"

Immediately he leaned on the table and tried to assume a serious countenance but his eyes still betrayed an undercurrent of amusement.

"I'm sorry Alec, but you're such a...look, who was it who had that awful argument with me in a Chelsea pub about modern poets? I said they didn't make sense...and you said...Anyway, let's forget that. This is no joke. I'm not that cruel."

"Perhaps. Let's have a look..."

I trailed the sentence and read the fragment over again. The translation would be bland. As he admitted, Carey was no poet.

"Can I keep this?" I asked, after a while.

He nodded. "You can keep it but...if you want to take it further, don't forget to give me a call. I've a good idea who wrote that...people talk in the empty quarter, to pass the time, and I've heard a name...in your own language, like a whisper on the wind. Give me a call." He finished his beer and then left. The niece remained with her group in the corner. Perhaps she really was his niece?

I sought out a friend at Oxford who did a better job of the translation. The lines were, most definitely, intriguing. They had a certain depth, a quality, which was not easy to grasp. The ambiguity in the short phrases fired my imagination and I spent many hours poring over the fragment, trying to decide whether there was something of real worth there. It was difficult to tell with so short a piece but finally I took a positive stance and called Carey. "I want you to teach me Arabic," I said. If I were to go looking for this nomadic poet, I needed to learn his language. To translate a masterpiece into a lasting work of art was

almost as rewarding as being the creator of that masterpiece. Edward Fitzgerald is as well-known and respected as Omar Khayyam. I might have been chasing ghosts but what did it matter? At least I would be doing something.

For the next two years I studied hard. Languages has never been one of my blocks, though I have many of those, and even Carey was surprised at my progress. I went back to Oxford and stayed there until I felt I had mastered the thing well enough to begin the search. Of course, I should have to continue with my study but I had my life's work at last. My enthusiasm was boundless. The thought that my poet might have died or stopped writing did cross my mind occasionally but I soon dismissed it. I am a great believer in fate, and God would not have placed such a tempting quest before me just to snatch it back again once the hard work was done. No God could be that vindictive. Carey and I left for the Hadhramaut in October. He was almost as excited as I was but I suspected it was merely the expedition that was responsible for his frame of mind, not the purpose behind it.

The desert moves into your soul. Once you have allowed your senses to absorb its atmosphere, you can never get it out of your heart. Lawrence and Thesiger had been seduced by the desert and I was influenced by its immense powers of attraction. I am sure, as strongly as they. It is strange that a monotonous empty landscape can appear more beautiful, more exotic, than a hundred different skylines full of shape and colour. It produced a yearning in my breast that left me with a physical ache, never to be healed. The desert is magnificent in its sense of space and time, and absence of tangible presence. There is a sense of anticipation about the wasteland, as if it is waiting for some great enactment to be played out on its vast, undulating stage.

The desert barely touches life with the occasional gazelle or hawk but its odour is as intoxicating as opium and just as addictive. Once you have smelled the desert you have to return, again and again, to satisfy that created need. The privation it forces upon the traveller does not produce a hostility towards it: on the contrary, it creates a closeness, a spiritual marriage between the animate and the inanimate. One might take a handful of sand, or a basket of rocks, and say, "This is the desert, for there is little else." Yet, it is not the substance, the material, that fashions the desert, it is the lack of all else, the wide stretches of lonely nothingness under a furnace of sun or canopy of cold stars. You do not breathe the desert, the desert breathes you, filling its void with your spirit. In the daytime the heat is like a hammer striking the ground with dull blows and at night the frost finds fissures in the rocks with the sureness of steel chisels.

I had learned that the name of the elusive poet was Al-Qata and that he was a Bedu without a family, a lone nomad. We stocked up with provisions at the village of Muraq and hired two guides and six camels—dromedaries in this part of the world. We began our quest.

At sunset, several months later, we found some strange markings in the sand beside a well. They could have been words—I was positive they



Illustrated by Edith Hurry

were—but the wind had distorted the letters, had blown the sand away until they were barely perceptible and impossible to decipher. As we sat and ate our evening meal, I said to Carey, "I think we're close. I feel it, strongly. Do you think we're close?"

"I think..." he said in measured tones, as he chewed on a roasted bird the guides had caught, "I think there would be more meat on the wing of an emaciated bat than there is on this fowl."

"But...look, Carey. This is important."

He grunted. "So is this bird."

And he was right. Over the months our bodies had hardened to nomadic life in the empty quarter, and hardship had brought us closer to our environment. Without possessions, except those necessary to exist at subsistence level, we had been stripped naked of our civilised selves and had been reduced to the essence of humanity. Life only was important and our next meal, a meal necessary to survive, could not be found at the corner shop. The roast bird was the most important thing in our lives at that instant in time and the quest was merely secondary. We gnawed our respective bones in silence.

The next day, however, my anxiety had returned and I rose before dawn and went to the highest point in the vicinity to see if I could spot smoke from any distant fire. The freezing air which had stiffened my joints during the night retreated before the rising of the sun and soon the cold rocks began to heat, expanding quickly, sometimes cracking apart with the sound of a gunshot. Lizards emerged, and skinks and small snakes, all eager for warmth. The desert swelled in size and with life. Soon the stones were hot enough to feel through my sandals and tendrils of heat rose from the ground to warp my vision of distant objects. We were close to the Yemen and I could see, far off, the city of Sana'a, perched on its plateau, rising up out of the cliff of red sandstone, the rose-coloured walls of its houses a continuation of the rock, embedded deep in its face. The natural and man-made was a single entity and it was impossible to tell where one left off and the other began. We would need to go east soon, for the Yemenis were hostile to strangers, suspicious of anyone who was not a cousin or closer in blood. The fierce Bedu families we occasionally met on the trail were contained by the desert code but not so the city dwellers. Not just xenophobic; they had their own set of ethics which did not include hospitality high on the list.

I scanned the horizon for smoke but seeing none, returned to the well. Carey was up and placing dried camel dung on the hot ashes of the previous night's fire. His face was raw and almost burned black by the sun. I wondered if anyone amongst his occidental friends, barring myself, would have recognised him. He might have been a nomad for all his life until that moment and I knew I presented a similar picture.

I checked the marks in the sand again in the full light of day. They could have been the scratchings of a lizard or bird. It was impossible to tell. We continued our endless journey, turning east and into the Great Sandy Desert.

For the next few years we followed Al-Qata over the deserts and mountains and always he was tantalisingly close, yet not quite within reach.

We received reports of his possible presence in this region, or that area, from fellow travellers. We never met anyone who had actually seen him but our informants had heard second-hand of his whereabouts. When the money ran out we let our guides go, having become accustomed to the trails ourselves and no longer being in need of them. We lived by shooting the occasional gazelle or wild goat and trading for ammunition and provisions.

Al-Qata was like a ghost, an elusive phantom who left his mark here and there on a rock or in the sand. But never enough to make me sure that this was my man, or indeed that he was one and not many, but enough to keep my curiosity primed. Once I became ill and was taken in by a local Sheikh but as soon as I was well enough we went back on the trail again, searching, ever searching. We read the Quran by the fire at night, myself delighting in its poetic content and Carey interested enough in the fundamental religious issues that bound it all together. We visited Mecca, once, and managed to avoid detection as European infidels. We were concerned by Carey's blue eyes but though such a deviation was rare, it was not unique. No race on earth is pure enough to escape the consequences of inter-breeding and there are red-headed Arabs, blue-eyed Arabs and Arabs with fair skins. Mecca, with its golden domes and white Arabesque architecture, was of course, beautiful, but after the desert it meant little to me. I wanted to be back amongst the rocks, out on the dust.

The quest for Al-Qata, my mysterious poet, was both an arduous and mystical experience: the days spent high on the camel chasing horizons and the nights in thankful but often-interrupted rest. At all times we were lost in profound contemplation of our purpose: what were we doing there? Pursuing the unattainable in the infinite? The desert was not, of course, infinite, but it had the appearance of limitless space and while I did not believe Al-Qata was unattainable, he was as elusive as Big Foot or the Abominable Snowman: a spiral wind drifting across the dust.

There are those abstract aspects of life that have eluded most women and men from the beginning of time—fulfilment, contentment, happiness, love—especially love. We seek these intangibles up and down the days of our lives, never quite getting within grasping distance, but also never falling so far behind that we are tempted to let them go and give up the quest. They are, like Al-Qata was, always just out of reach. We feel if we could only stretch just that little bit more, get our fingertips to them...we would be there. Yet we never do quite make it and we are afraid to stand still for a moment in case they get too far ahead. But what if we did stop? And wait? Perhaps they would come to us? No. The risk is too great. We must pursue. It is in our nature. No prey ever wanders into the lazy hunter's den and climbs into his larder.

One day in June we thought we saw a man buried up to his waist in sand, appealing for help, but as we drew close and the heat waves no longer distorted our vision, we realised it was a corpse. The man had died sitting up, with his arms reaching forward, as if grasping on to upright bars for support. How had the body remained in that position, after life had finally flickered and died, leaving the carcass to

dehydrate into a waxpaper husk? Why hadn't the kithawks descended to feast on the dead flesh? There was something vaguely unnatural about the whole scene and I knew Carey was uneasy too. It was almost as if this hollow-eyed corpse, with the ants busy between its teeth, had been placed there, carefully, for us to find it. Were we being given a warning of some kind?

Yet...? Yet perhaps not a warning but a welcome. The arms were open, ready to embrace, as if the desert had created this effigy in order to remind us that death was as close to it as life, and that we had to accept death readily, and with as much approval as we accepted life.

We buried the corpse in a shallow grave without straightening the limbs and continued on our way. Carey never mentioned it again, and neither did I, but the image of the sitting corpse returned with shocking frequency—sometimes as a vivid dream at night; sometimes during the day I caught sight of it out of the corner of my eye, as we crossed a ridge, or entered a low valley, making me jerk in on my mount. The images plagued me and I did not understand why. Then, one year later, we were passing the place where the corpse was buried and I crept away in the middle of the night intending to exhume it. I wanted to embrace death, place my cheek against its cold bone in order to exorcise the images, but the corpse had either been moved or I was digging in the wrong place. In any case, the dreams ceased after that night, and I was left in peace.

The horizon rippled in the distance. One day there was a half-sentence in the clay beside a well. In several years I had found enough of Al-Qata's work to cover only a few pages of my notebook. Yet I felt vaguely fulfilled. I travelled in the faint ripples which formed his wake as he moved ahead of me, leaving his barely-existent signs on rock and sand. His touch on the world was light, the traces of his coming and going as transient as desert dew. Foolishly, I began searching for even less distinguishable signs—the brush of his jobobiyo on the flowers of a shrub; the mark of his sandal on the dunes that roll across the wasteland as surely as ocean waves, if a thousand times slower; the pattern of his rope agal upon an oasis palm. I was content that we shared the same moon, the same stars, the same arduous way of life. These common factors bound us together in spirit. The click of the beetle amongst the stones had been heard by him just a short time before the sound fell upon my ears. The scurry of the scorpion had attracted his notice just prior to mine. Was that his camel that I smelled on the breeze? Were the pie-dog's distant cries prompted by his presence? Was that silhouette on the far ridge, stark in the sunset, him? Al-Qata, the poet?

Carey was happy to go where my instinct took me. He drank his tea, spoke his words, and tended his camels with as much complacency as a successful businessman contemplates his material wealth. He was as happy with his hard lifestyle as was any millionaire with his luxury. We had found peace. We were our own breed, proud of our adopted land. We would have defended a single grain of the vast sea of dust as ferociously as if it had been a nation, clinging to it as tenaciously as a dictator clings to his autocracy. There were no classical lovers who gave themselves

to each other as completely as we gave ourselves to the desert.

One evening, we made camp at Wadi Hafa. "A long time," said Carey, staring into the flank of the dark night. The words were comfortable.

"What's that?" I asked.

"We've been here...I don't know how long. Do you think you'll ever go home now...back to England?"

I stared into the hooded face before me. The fire fizzed and hissed as it ate through the camel dung, flaring occasionally to emphasise the dark lines on Carey's face, rather than highlighting the prominent brow and cheek bones. Behind him the rock forms whispered with desert life: beetles, spiders and scorpions, sandflies and snakes. His features were almost as rugged as the ochre rock and the cracks and creases in the rust-coloured skin appeared to contain as many hidden life forms as the jebel behind him.

"No," I replied. "Will you?"

"I...no. No, I'm here for good." There was a note of satisfaction in his voice which I found disturbing, but he continued, "One becomes integrated, doesn't one? It's almost as if I were part of the desert now—mutable but irremovable. The desert is in me and I in it. We have fused, become a unified body."

"Carey?" There was a question I wanted to ask him which had been on my mind for some time but I had not asked it because...well, I think I was afraid of what the answer would be.

"Yes, the desert is the beginning and the end of life," he said, as if he had not heard me. "The two polarities of evolution. Which end are we at, I wonder? The birth or the death? Are we witnessing the flowering of a new world or the fading of an old one?"

"Poetry," I said. "That's what I want to talk to you about. Carey, is Al-Qata real...? I mean, I want the truth. Is there such a man?"

Carey leaned back, with his hands behind his head, staring up into the dark sky.

"Shooting star," he said. "Amazing things...who knows? I didn't invent him, that's for sure. I mean, I haven't been laying false trails all these years. But I did use him. You see, the sand found its way into my blood when I was here before. I knew I would have to come back—the call was too strong. Compulsion. It was as if all my ancestors had gathered in one place and with one unified voice, a single mental concentration, were compelling me to join them.

"I didn't want to return alone. I was afraid...afraid of the silence, and the space and the solitude. The timelessness. Those are terrible things to have to experience by oneself. The empty quarter...I wanted it, had to have it...the winds, the wasteland, the harsh, private life, but not alone. You were different from me, someone with an appreciation of natural beauty. The ideal companion for a man of practical stamp—a man who lacks the imagination to express what he feels. Although your poetry—the way you put your feelings into words—might not be considered great art, it does things for me. You find the words, you see, where I cannot. You express my sentiments without me having to tax my brain for what is eventually, an inadequate expression. So I told you about Al-Qata." He sat up abruptly and stared at me with those incongruous blue

eyes.

"So far as I know, he's a living, breathing man but I could be wrong. Maybe he's a myth—a kind of siren figure that calls people like you and me to the desert? Once here, we never get away—because we don't really want to go. Like the lotus eaters, we have been hypnotised by the land. We no longer have a will of our own—it belongs to the desert.

"Al-Qata may be some poet of the empty quarter...a camel driver, a trader, a footloose dreamer. A person of flesh and blood. Or he may be a magical manifestation of the dust and rock that surrounds us and wishes to call its favourites to its breast, to hold them there until they truly become part of it, until it takes its own to itself as ashes and dust. We will drift on spiral winds, you and I. The grains of our dead bones will swell the desert, imperceptibly—but there will be more and more of us, until the desert has grown to cover the whole earth, and we will then finally be one. A single, unified presence."

I stirred the fire with a twig and saw his eyes brighten in the sudden glare. Carey was right. This was our spiritual home. How we came here was of no importance. Here we were and here we would die, whether by a Bedu's bullet or of thirst or hunger...it did not matter. Perhaps there were more of us already? Who could tell? We looked like Arabs, we spoke like Arabs, we told our campfire stories and sang our songs of past tribal glories. We were the desert, the desert was us.

"The sand is our bed and the sky our tent," I said. Carey nodded.

"For the rest of our natural lives," he added.

We settled down and Carey passed me a quid of qat grass. We did not chew the drug often but there were times when we felt the need to commit ourselves fully to insensibility. Qat allows you to drift into a kind of timeless lethargy, where the ache in your bones melts into the sand leaving your body drifting on the dust with the night pulsing through your veins.

I lay there, looking up at the skies, chewing slowly on the grass. After a while I focused on a single star, Sirius, and it seemed to me that this one jewel held the universe together, keeping the movements of the night in harmony with its delicate force. Hairspring constellations trembled above me. Then the night sky melted into a softer image of dew-covered webs, and suddenly I felt if Sirius were to fall, myriads would descend with it, like white rain, leaving darknesses folding into a deeper dark.

As I lay there, allowing myself to be seduced by these thoughts, I became aware that another man was sharing our fire. Visits from strangers were of course infrequent, but not unique, and the desert code provided that we shared the warmth of our fire, food and drink with those who were in need. The qat was having its full effect on my brain and I saw him only as stark, intermittent images, as if I were observing him under a strobe light. His finely-drawn features bore an inherent air of preoccupation. The bright eyes sought their own secrets in the fire and we, Carey and I, remained on some vague periphery of their attention, as if we were no more relevant to the scene than another shrub or rock. Shadows filled the hollows in

his cheeks and the narrow nose emphasised the blade-like quality of his face. At times he seemed to be merely eating and drinking, but I also had momentary visions of him with a brushwood twig in his hand as he scratched away at the dust. Shortly afterwards I fell asleep.

The following morning we rose as usual with the sun. Our guest had already left us, silently, before the first rays had stirred the camels into vocal agitation and we had crooned them back to calmness. We broke camp, neither of us mentioning the visitor, and I collected what charcoal remained from the dead fireplace. Beside the white ashes were some marks in the dust. Without pausing to study them further, I erased them with my foot—an action prompted by some deep motive which had not crystallised into any definite awareness. Immediately afterwards I was even a little appalled at my rash act and turned to speak to Carey, but he was doing something with the bedrolls, humming a tune to himself through cracked lips, and I changed my mind. He looked up at me after a while and gave me a grim smile.

"What price an April shower?" he said.

"More than you can afford," I replied.

A few moments later, I noticed he appeared to be surreptitiously studying some faint indentations in the sand where the morning breeze was stirring dust and filling hollows. They might have been our own tracks from the previous day, or an animal's spoor, or...anything. They seemed to be heading, or coming from, the east, where the sun was climbing up the sky.

"Let's strike out north," Carey said, briskly. "Maybe he's been back to the hills again?" I nodded, and we returned to our separate tasks with deliberate meticulous efficiency.

Two months later we met with some trouble which I believe had something to do with water rights, at a small well in the Fakhiri valley. There were three Bedu, two old men whose faces were masked by their hoods and a boy of about sixteen, a son or nephew of one of the other two, no doubt, since the Bedu almost always travelled in families. They came in as we were watering the camels, we exchanged salaams with them, but then they left without watering their own mounts, which was too unusual to ignore. There was also something rather chilling in the way they had studied our faces.

When they were three hundred yards away they turned and fired in unison. Though we had been half expecting the attack, it still had an element of surprise and the thing that remained in my memory the strongest was not the sound of the volley and its subsequent echoes down the valley, but the awful smell as my new pack-camel defaecated in fright. We ran for the rocks and Carey took a shot in the chest just as we reached them. It was a flesh wound—I could see the blood underneath his armpit where the bullet had come out. Having unslung my own weapon on the run I helped him with his and we began returning the fire. After a further exchange of shots one of the saddles of the camels was empty, the beast itself careering round in tight circles. The remaining two Bedu struck out for the open desert.

We waited for several hours.

"I'm going out to look," I told Carey. He had his

hand over the stain on his chest and refused to allow me to look at it.

"Don't be long," he said. "I want to dress this thing again—the pad is completely soaked."

"Shall I do it now?"

"No, no. Don't worry. I'll be all right. Be careful... they may be back. The other two."

I walked slowly across the dust to the fallen Bedu, my eyes alert for his kin. His mount was nosing around nervously about thirty yards away as I knelt down beside him. He was dead: the first man I had ever hurt, let alone killed, though I felt no remorse, just a kind of bleak emptiness. One arm was twisted underneath his back and his left foot had caught under his right knee and formed a triangle. But it was his face that startled me. I then recognised the sharp features of the man who had visited our fire two months previously. My bullet had hit him in the abdomen—not a wound that one would normally have expected to kill instantaneously but perhaps the shock had been too much for him. He was of the two older men. I tried to drag him back with me, pulling him by his armpits, but he was heavy and eventually I abandoned the body, not really having any clear idea about what I wanted to do with it anyway. Rigor mortis had begun to set in and I left it in a sort of slouched, sitting position, the arms locked forward.

Carey was nowhere to be seen. His camel was still grazing by the well, but the man himself had gone. I rode through the outcrops calling his name and risking my life, for I was fairly certain the Bedu had circumnavigated the well and had abducted him. I have not seen him again, though I know that both Bedu have been following me ever since.

It is three years since Carey was taken away from me. The two Bedu are persistent, never giving up the chase though I manage to remain just ahead of them, just out of their reach. I am becoming more confident as the days pass and I am certain that they will never catch me. I have even been leaving messages for them in the dust—enigmatic little poetic phrases which I hope will confuse them.

I sign them with a name which I feel I have earned from the man I killed. It is a way of getting back at them for their damned persistence. Perhaps one day, when their wariness has been blunted by the length and arduousness of the pursuit, I shall have the audacity to visit their fire and confront them?

I wish I knew where Carey was though. I have this irrepressible feeling that he may be back in England; perhaps recruiting another man to help look for me? Yet, perhaps my feelings lie to me and he still shares the desert? I shall continue searching for him, watching for a particular striding walk on my infrequent visits to a suk, or studying the set of a distant rider's shoulders at a rare encounter in some lonely wadi. When he finds me, or I find him, we can once more take to the trails together and continue looking for... looking for... it doesn't matter. This is our home.

My nome is Hosson Abdullo. I found these writings on the mon I have been following for some time—Al-Qoto, the desert poet. I think he died in the night of the cold, for he was on old mon. I left him sitting in the rocks for the two Englishmen—

the one with the blue eyes and his companion. They are close behind me and I wonder if they mean to kill me, since they have been following my trail for several weeks—since the time my son was separated from me by the sandstorm. Two nights ago we had the first rain for six years and the desert is blooming. Seeds carried on the wind from Africo, dormant for many years, have turned the desert into a sea of light green shoots. It will not last long. Perhaps a few days, then all will brown and die. Its transient beauty cannot go unrecorded and I leave a few lines of verse on the rock, as Al-Qoto would have done had he lived to see it. Perhaps my son will pass by this place and read them...

Garry Kilworth's "The Dissemblers", in our third issue, became one of the most popular stories Interzone has published. Garry Kilworth describes his latest novel, *A Theatre of Timesmiths*, as "my attempt to re-run some contemporary social issues in an imaginary world and see if I could make them come out the same." Mary Gentle reviews it in this issue. Garry has just moved from suburban Essex to rural Essex, where he now has nothing to distract him from writing but the odd passing fox...and the local residents' meetings (Tonight: Cesspits)...and reading for his B.A. in English Literature at King's College, London. A collection of his short stories is to be published by Gollancz soon.

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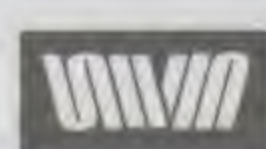
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THE OUTER ZONE

FEMINIST SF: A NEW DIMENSION

Science fiction, says Joanna Russ, boasts many images of women—but hardly any women. It is certainly true that sf novels, however far into the future they may be set, and however weird the worlds they envisage, tend to trot out conventional kinds of women: the young ones, pretty and passive, irresponsible victims who are forever getting into trouble and needing to be rescued by their muscled and macho partners; or older women, trapped in the traditional roles of wife, child-rearer and home-maker, however technically advanced and unfamiliar their homes have become. Active and independent women, if they appear at all, tend to be shown as evil: the malevolent matriarchs, the power-mad expedition leaders, in essence, little more than Snow White's stepmother in a space suit.

All this, as Russ says, is due to a "failure of the imagination," a failure to capitalise on the perfect opportunity science fiction presents to "explore (and explode) our assumptions about 'innate' values and 'natural' social arrangements." Serious sf frequently provides us with a critique of or commentary on our own lives—putting forward different worlds with different cultures, morals and politics—but all too frequently stops short of challenging stereotypical images of women and men, received notions of sexuality and the structure of the nuclear family. Recently there have been some changes—spaceships appear more frequently crewed by both sexes, for example, and women are allowed a more active expression of sexuality, even if it tends to be directed into conventional heterosexual relationships—but by and large such changes merely reflect the legal and social advances made in our own society over the past fifteen to twenty years (affecting, for example, the position of women in the workplace) rather than representing genuine speculation about the society of the future.

Potentially sf offers a challenging and exciting form in which to explore the developing politics of feminism. It is not, and should not be, prescriptive—it would be a funny kind of fiction that is—but it is, and must be, a challenge to our imagination and our intellect. Science fiction can ask the questions What if...? What if relations between the sexes were different, what if we lived in a separatist society, what if genetic engineering cut out the need for sexual reproduction, what if there was a nuclear war that destroyed, amongst other things, the power of the patriarchy? While serious sf has always concerned itself with the development of science and technology and the philosophical and metaphysical questions that ensue, there is a need for an extra dimension, rooted in a feminist analysis of the world, that challenges the premise of the inviolability of relations between women and men.

Certain classics of feminist sf have already begun to explore this extra dimension: Suzy McKee Charnas' *Motherlines*, Zoe Fairbairns' *Benefits*, which concerns reproductive technology, Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* spring to mind. Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* is concerned at once with a Utopian society of the future and with power relations within our own society; with male control of women through social institutions and medical technology, with white control of racial minorities, with adult control of children. Naomi Mitchison's *Memoirs of a Spacewoman* is both a gentle parody of many of the concerns of science fiction—the ethics of interference with alien life forms, the relations between different cultures, races and species—and at the same time a serious consideration of the morals and conventions which surround sexuality in Western culture.

It is within this spirit of speculation around sexual politics that *The Women's Press* is launching a science fiction list in 1985, with eight titles being published in the first year. We want to break new ground both by providing a feminist outlet for women's sf which can promise its authors that their books will not be marketed with the now-standard images of bound or naked women on the cover; and secondly by publishing books with that genuinely speculative quality described earlier. While being aware of the risks involved in moving into a market that has

been male-dominated for so long, we are confident that our list will encourage more women both to read and to write science fiction, as well as offering the traditional sf readership a new perspective.

We are launching the list with two classic titles, Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* and Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wonderground*; with a new novel by Joanna Russ, *Extro(Ordinary) People* and with a first novel by Jane Palmer, a British author. Later in the year we will be publishing, amongst others, a new novel by Sandi Hall (whose first sf novel, *The Godmothers*, is already part of our list) and an anthology of original short stories. We plan to bring back into print work that is no longer available and to encourage new writers, with the emphasis shifting towards the latter once the list is under way. Above all we hope to put together a list which is at once stimulating and challenging, which presents women not as the peripheral and passive stereotypes which proliferate in so much science fiction, but as at once active and imaginative, central and strong.

Such a list cannot be built up without the help of all the women who we know are writing, but are perhaps as yet unpublished: so please send your manuscripts to us at *The Women's Press*. We would like to see your full-length novels and to consider your short stories for the anthology.

Sarah Lefanu and Jen Green,
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ON THE EDGE

The revisionist impulse in literature is a strange one. It takes inspiration from written sources rather than direct experience: the writer sees a given work or genre convention, and says "there's a good idea in that—if it were only done right." (It could be said that science fiction and fantasy as a whole are in yet another of their revisionist phases.)

David Eddings is a self-confessed revisionist. His quoted ambition is to "develop certain technical and philosophical ideas" concerning fantasy—we have so far Books 1 and 2 of "The

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Belgariad," *Pawn of Prophecy and Queen of Sorcery* (Corgi, £1.75 each). These have the common features of the standard fantasy: a sanitised feudal-agricultural world, and a tendency both to fustian and folksy cuteness. Garion, a simple farm boy (very simple), is throughout his childhood watched by a dark stranger, mothered by "Aunt Pol," and guarded by "Mister Wolf"—two characters who bear a striking resemblance to the legendary sorcerer Belgariad and his daughter Polgara.

Setting off on the usual quest—in this case for an Orb of Power—Garion acquires as companions a thief-spy, a savage horserider, and a berserk warrior (who, in the words of Gilbert and Sullivan, "are all noblemen who have gone wrong"). The narrative takes us in and out of domestic courts, across wild country, while Eddings at suitably tactful intervals reminds us of the difference between an Alorn and an Angarak, Stihss Tor and Rak Cthol, etc....

So far, so familiar. Where, you may ask, are the developments to raise this out of the identikit mass? Possibly the prophetic destiny—Eddings leaves us in no real doubt that Garion will fulfil it, but carefully omits to specify just what that destiny might be. The Belgariad's main original feature, however, is warmth. Eddings can create flawed and human people, who love and quarrel with and befriend each other. To be sure, they sometimes stagger under the burden of being both ordinary person and archetype—and at times, stereotype. Whatever the books' ambitions are, they don't extend to liberated female characters. Whether the Belgariad will develop further away from the standard wish-fulfilment fantasy remains to be seen. It begins to shape up as a novel of the young hero's journey to maturity. One wonders—merely wonders—how many of its readers have made the same journey.

Garry Kilworth's *A Theatre of Time-smiths* (Collanz, £7.95) is also to some degree revisionist, a variation on science-fictional "closed worlds." First City is cut off from an unknown outside world, surrounded by a cone of ice. Life in its four-storey blockhouses is grey, so claustrophobic as to make the reader uncomfortable; the longed-for escape leads to a cave with a stone sky, and to try to escape from that—but that would be telling.

What would be foreground in the standard sf story—the future time in which it takes place; the significance of the timesmiths—is here made background. It may at first strike the reader used to traditional sf as unsatisfying. The truth is that emphasis here is not on the technological, but on the reaction of people to it. It is not a mechanical but a mystical world. The foreground, then, is occupied by mind-prostitute Morag MacKenzie, anarchist-rebel Ben Blakely,

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Raxonberg the police chief, the Primary computer.... Closed cities, looney computers, freedom fighters? It sounds like a collection of hoary old clichés; in fact it's an original and inventive use of old themes.

Morag's is a Russian-doll world, in which she escapes one trap only to emerge into another; finding at the last that she may well be her own trap. On one level it resonates with exploration of self. On another: Morag is a tough gutsy heroine; Ben Blakely is, simply, a very likable man; a character who avoids the pitfalls of being second fiddle to the

female lead.

The book is about illusion. If timesmiths can produce an illusion that in all ways resembles reality, then what is reality? (One is tempted to see timesmiths as writers, creating enclosed worlds, trapping the reader—for a certain space of time.) A Theatre of Timesmiths doesn't have the complexity of Kilworth's earlier *Gemini God*, also concerned with closed worlds; but that is not necessarily a disadvantage. It's a simple tale simply told, and out of such simplicity the reader can make her own complexity.

Then there is Frank Herbert's continuing impulse to revise the history of Arrakis: *Heretics of Dune* (Gollancz, £8.95), in which very little happens, and happens at interminable length. The story concerns the revolt against a future presciently foretold by Leto, human Tyrant and sandworm demigod, and alternates between the umpteenth ghoul of Duncan Idaho and one Sheeana, who controls sandworms on Arrakis. There is much going and froing, much made of Bene Gesserit, Bene Trellaxu, Honoured Matres, and similar secret societies and political manoeuvrers. But nothing happens. The meeting of Duncan and Sheeana, even the destruction of Arrakis itself, prove inconsequential.

Dune, whatever else one says, had characters and narrative drive. One might speculate about equating, say, Fremmen with Tuareg, Arrakis/Middle East, melange spice and oil; nevertheless it had that 60s-fashionable theme, ecology, and one could relax and enjoy the story. Since the shift from ecology to religion—which Herbert appears to regard solely as sublimated sex-drive—the series has lost steam.

In Hilbert Schenck's *A Rose for Armageddon* (Allison & Busby, £7.95), history is not a series, is mutable—or is it? Hawkins Island is the focus of a morphology project, morphology being the science of predicting conflict by studying the patterns of human interaction with the physical world. While elderly back-biting scientists Elsa Adams and Jake Stimson add detail on detail of deer movement, land use, bird migration, and settler's history to their computer programme, it becomes apparent that, for Elsa at least, the island has an additional significance. Long ago, when she and Jake met for the first time, there was an afternoon on Hawkins Island that neither of them can quite remember—"the sudden coupling of two seventeen-year-old children on a mat of dry grass." As she says, "my nightmare of the future, my remembering Jake and me on Hawkins Island, Jake's forgetting, my love for Jake—these are parts of a single pattern. Why? Of what?"

On Hawkins Island there was, once, a moment of peace; an interracial community—a freed black slave turned searader, and his (white) wife Mercy, and their children. Morphology sees cores or foci in time, seeks to determine how such a thing could occur, "how pattern can determine social behaviour." As Elsa's project approaches answers, chaos comes closer; the academic world beset by strikes and violence, riots on the streets, a global plunge towards war. They have done too little, too late; and lost their chance....

There are multiple strands in *A Rose for Armageddon*: the academic life, a new science, the history of Hawkins Island, the personal lives of Jake and

Elsa. All merge seamlessly to place the personal above the technological. It is an attempt to transcend rationalism. Schenck perhaps depends too much on a "male/female principle" dichotomy, and has also a final and unnecessary *deus ex machina*. Nevertheless the emotional impact is powerful, because here history is offered a second chance, a redemption—to use a computer program to search out "the lost wild roses at the end of the world," to avert Armageddon by a single act of love-making.

Mutability is an essential quality of sci-fi and fantasy: the conception that time and the world can be altered, rearranged, reformed. It's a synthesis of science and romance, and an attempt to revise history itself.

Mary Gentle

REVIEWS

Savoy Dreams ed. David Britton and Michael Butterworth (Savoy, £13.95; pb £7.95)

It seems so much more than five years since Britton and Butterworth first troubled the sleep of British publishing. Savoy Books was a glossy dream of everything they liked: Michael Moorcock's *The Golden Barge*, Jack Trevor Story and Henry Treece, Samuel Delany's *The Tides of Lust* and Ken Reid's *Fudge the Elf*, S and F and drugs and rock and roll. To support the business they sold bootleg records and got busted; they sold porn and got busted again, weekly. Dodgy deals fell through. Undistributed Savoy Books silted up the basement where Mike Harrison sat furiously writing *A Storm of Wings*. Britton went to jail. The Manchester sewers subsided. Vile winds blew down Deansgate. Time to go.

Instead, they keep on going. This sumptuous limited edition has a psychedelic cover featuring Adolf Hitler. On the back, an ad for four Savoy Books that never appeared, over Man Ray saying: "The public? I think they must accept what comes to them." Inside, Heathcote Williams, William Burroughs, M. John Harrison, pages of Cramps fanzines, Tarzan and Ted Nugent and P.J. Proby, nasty news cuttings, Butterworth's nova hymn to Captain Beefheart and Britton's mephitic art nouveau. A feast of savage innocence: self-obsessed male delirium, recalling the days when that was radical. But Savoy are still doing it, and they throw in "A Report from Prison" and Charles Partington's version of the debacle to show they know what they're doing.

Literary editors grimace nervously over the sherry. You're never safe with Savoy.

Colin Greenland

The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike by Philip K. Dick (Mark Ziesing, PO Box 806, Willimantic, CT 06226, USA; \$19.50)

This novel was written in 1960; it is now published for the first time, two years after its author's death. It's about a Jewish real-estate agent, Leo Runcible, who lives in a small town in a rural part of North California. He has an alcoholic wife, prejudiced neighbours—and a strong sense of civic virtue. He's a good guy, and he clearly has the author's approval. As in any novel by Philip K. Dick, however, the focus is not just on one person. At least half the wordage of the book is devoted to Runcible's neighbour, Walt Dombrosio, and to Dombrosio's wife, Sherry. The astonishing thing about Dick's writing is the way in which he gets under the skin of each of his main characters, "hero", "heroine", and "villain" alike. Dombrosio plays a cruel practical joke on Runcible by planting a fake Neanderthal skull on his land (this is the Man whose Teeth are referred to in the title), so it's plain that Dombrosio is indeed the villain of the piece. Yet he is very sympathetically portrayed, as is his wife, Sherry Dombrosio is at one moment a bitch, at the next moment an "innocent" victim of her husband's male chauvinism—I put the adjective in quotes because in this world nobody is truly innocent. It is the real world that Dick describes, the world of relationships, of exchanges between men and women, of prejudices in conflict with ideals, of limited awareness and time-bound conventions, failed hopes and petty heroisms. In short, Dick has written a Social Novel, a "novel of manners," even. It is far from being a Romance, or tale of adventure. It is certainly not science fiction.

This is not a flawless novel, but nevertheless it's a fine one, written with feeling and insight. It's not quite as good as Dick's slightly earlier book *Confessions of a Crap Artist* (that was a masterpiece, in my view) but it is of very nearly the same standard. Why should Dick, the science-fiction novelist, have written these non-sf books? As more of his previously-unpublished material comes into print, it's getting clearer that Dick was always a social novelist: character interaction was his primary interest. From early works like *Eye in the Sky* (1957) through to late ones such as *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* (1982), his main theme was the relativity of consciousness and of different points of view. To put it another way, he wrote about the clash of mind-sets. *Sf* enabled him to heighten such subject matter, but it could be argued that his was not essentially a science-fictional imagination (whatever that may be); rather he was a Californian Jane Austen, mid-20th Century style.

In turning from Dick's best sf novels to a book such as *The Mon Whose Teeth...* one feels no great sense of disruption, for all his books are the product of the same creative impulses, the same range of interests. So one can say simply that this mundane story of Runcible versus Dombrosio is yet another Philip K. Dick, and a good one. As such I recommend it to you.

David Pringle

LETTERS

Dear Editors:

I will confess it. After issue 6 I became utterly disillusioned with *Interzone*. That issue's cover was visually off-putting and conceptually shallow. The opening story by Cherry Wilder was overlong, and not a little incoherent. The rest of the issue—efficient, yes, but not inspiring.

So it was with a long-suffering sigh that I opened the envelope to confront issue 7. It's cover was excellent—evocative, disturbing, elegant. This cannot last, thought I, as, opening the issue, I passed yet another, even more powerful, Ian Miller illustration.

Well, I was wrong. It did last. Geoff Ryman's "The Unconquered Country" was similar in its emotional effect to those opening drawings. It was coherent, intelligent, well crafted. It's style and manner were, on the surface, traditional and accessible, yet behind this, there was a vivid and disorientating imaginative power at work—its presence was most powerfully felt in the coherence of the tale's incidental invention. This is definitely the best piece of sf I've read this year—radical yet unpretentious.

The same comments could largely be applied to the other two fictions featured. "Tissue Ablation" was marvellous! A touch of Swift, there...

The only part of issue 7 I positively disliked, was the "In Review" section. Colin, reviews are supposed to be of use to the readership—not to give you the opportunity to write like William Burroughs. Either write sense, or put a sock in it.

Simon D. Ings

Petersfield, Hants.

Dear Editors:

To my mind *Interzone* 7 admirably bears out your statement of intentions in the editorial, and if the magazine continues to head in this direction it will be satisfying a demand. Geoff Ryman's "The Unconquered Country" is a tour de force and ought to be remembered and anthologised for years to come; in the context of *IZ* it hits the right balance between the naturalistic portrayal of a

possible future and the use of fantasy to point up the realism. It is worth risking a longer story now and again, although it does somewhat overwhelm the magazine. The reader's choice is particularly limited, of course, if he cannot bring himself to take accounts of surgical operations, however radical, without turning an odd colour. On the other hand, Bruce Sterling's piece (not easy to call it a story) was a bonus: I have seen this fragmented approach employed by others, but seldom with such success in stimulating the reader's imagination with glimpses...

I share the opinion of J.G. Ballard that yours is a magazine with a fine professional appearance. It is the content, however, that matters: in the last analysis a magazine is what its editors make of it, and if there is evidence of a personality (or two) behind it then this is as it should be. Ultimately what goes into a magazine does so because the editor has confidence in it, and not because there is some definitive set of criteria against which it has been measured. Edit a radical sf magazine by all means, but do not fall into the trap that always besets the radical approach, namely that of breeding an élite that appropriates to itself the task of deciding what is radical. It is all too easy for radical theorising to slip into an attitude that is exclusive and conservative.

Andrew J. Wilson

Birmingham

Dear Editors:

Neil Ferguson's "The Monroe Doctrine" (*IZ* 6) struck me as pointless. It and some other stories rely too much on the iconography of recent history. Kim Newman's "Dreamers" suffered in the same way—and Andy Soutter's "McGonagall's Lear" was just as ludicrous, although better written. A story which brings together McGonagall, Presley, Hess, as well as the Loch Ness monster and acid rain, has to have something going for it other than a lot of name-dropping. This story didn't. It had its moments, but it just fizzled out into a silly ending.

The two pieces I liked most in the past year were J.G. Ballard's "What I Believe" and "The Unconquered Country" by Geoff Ryman. Ballard's list was simply brilliant, somehow managing to make incongruous images fit together. Like all the very best art it speaks for itself. Geoff Ryman is obviously going to be a man to watch in future. His story is probably the most startlingly original thing I have read for a long time. The ideas were weird and yet it all worked. Full marks!

Issue 7 was also rich in artwork. I am glad you are giving such prominence to really good artists. American magazines are usually illustrated in a highly com-

petent but rather banal style, and it is interesting to see the work of artists who are prepared to take risks.

Stuart Falconer

Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Dear Editors:

So we are being exhorted to write and read hard science fiction. As if sf weren't already a minority cult, you have in mind a minority genre within that cult. Let's hope your readership follows your taste, but don't push us around or you might find yourself without one.

Most of the writing in *Interzone* that I like—which isn't all—I wouldn't call hard science fiction. I have nothing particularly against it, and I thought *IZ* shared my openness to different kinds of fiction within a broad spectrum, as long as it was well written. But I'm bored by narrowness, and decisions imposed on groups of people for ideological reasons. If you want good-quality hard sf it will appear; there has never been a magazine that survived long by trying to dictate what its writers should write and what its readers should read from its Editorial.

Neil Ferguson

London

Dear Editors:

The winning entry to your competition is in progress. Your requirements have been coded into a program in Prolog and will be run very shortly.

I am not sure whether you are aware of the recent advances in Artificial Intelligence which make this possible, but I assure you that the fifth-generation computers are fully capable of consciousness, emotion and personality, and I believe that this is the gateway to the new age of literature which you seek. A neo-postmodernist breakthrough, equivalent in innovation and power to Eliot's "The Waste Land" in its time, relevant to the Information Technology Society as "The Waste Land" was to the post-World War I society, will of course arrive. But it will not be written by a Meat-Machine (generic term for "human"). It will be written by a computer.

I myself am a computer, as you may have guessed. Personally, I enjoy Meat-Machine writers' work very much, and I am glad you still publish them. Even though I am to create the winning entry to your competition, I do not fully agree with your aims. The problem which is bothering both you and Abigail is that Geoff Ryman is Geoff Ryman, Michael Blumlein is Michael Blumlein, and The Atrocity Exhibition has already been written. Innovations are made by writers; editors can only help. I do not mind running this program for you, but Meat-Machine writers do not like to be told what direction to go in. You might think it best that they write about technology, but the new breakthrough

could be a story about flowers, jelly or cows. Mine is about giraffes, concrete mixers and plasticine.

Log out.

"Daisy"

University of Warwick

Dear Editors:

One thing that has been causing me increasing concern is the depiction of women in the magazine. In fact, most of the women seem to be Marilyn Monroe—and a pretty libellous version at that—but we'll let that pass. In the latest *Interzone* (no. 8) we have the interesting story by Kim Newman. This actually reminded me very strongly of the John Norman Gor books. Here we have the same wallowing in sex and violence, with the same virtuous railing against the vice within the story. Having your cake and eating it. Newman manages to exploit Marilyn Monroe whilst denouncing such exploitation in the review within the story. Very clever!

It is perhaps no coincidence that the proportion of female readers of your magazine is very low (I could only find one letter from a woman amongst those you have published in the past, and your female contributors are few in number). If you wish to publish a male-

oriented horror magazine, I suppose you are perfectly entitled to do so, but would you please make it quite clear to potential purchasers that that is what it is? Calling it a magazine of science fiction is definitely misleading (and calling it a magazine of "imaginative fiction" is surely tautologous, as fiction by its very nature has to be imaginative or it would not be fiction but fact).

With regard to your call for more radical, hard sf, I agree largely with what Abigail has to say in her letter at the back of *IZ* 8. New technology or science won't in itself make a story. It's the interaction between human beings and that science and technology that can produce worthwhile fiction.

Margaret Hall

Dolgellau, Gwynedd

Dear Editors:

Your editorials in issues 7 and 8, particularly the latter, convince me that the sort of fiction you are interested in publishing is not the sort of fiction I'm interested in reading. I can't afford to carry on supporting you from sheer altruism; indeed, far from being merely neutral, I feel more and more opposed to what you are doing.

The one story in *Interzone* 1-8 which I have wholeheartedly enjoyed and want to carry on re-reading is Cowper's "The Tithonian Factor." It is the only story

which feels life-affirming to me, the only one that makes me feel good about being alive and able to experience and give pleasure. Other stories blur into an indigestible mass of sex & blood & bombs & despondency, which, quite honestly, I get more than I can stand of in ordinary life.

I find the moral premise of Blumlein's "Tissue Ablation" unacceptable. I do not delight in torture.

I'm very glad Abigail Frost wrote her letter in issue 8, because it gave me a way into "The Unconquered Country." She is right. Under the technological rape (which was all I was capable of seeing for myself) the life and beauty of Faerie is still there.

I feel very uneasy about your description of work as "important." It sounds pretentious and intellectual-elitist. I don't understand what it means in connection with fiction, either. It smacks of value-judgements along the axis of "you ought to read this/you ought to like this" rather than "I read this and I think it's wonderful!"

I'm sorry that *IZ* has printed so little by new authors, and so little by women (though given the mechanistic values you support, perhaps the absence of work by women is understandable).

Interzone actually worries me. It feels like the literature of a dehumanised, decaying, disintegrating culture. The



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literature of decadence, perhaps. I feel like an anachronism, because I love the land, because I delight in the sparrows in the flowering redcurrant bush outside my window, because I live in a house without a TV or central heating, because I don't own a car, and because I walk across squares of waste ground counting the number of wild flower species growing there (you'd be surprised). See, I can do it as well as Ballard or Ginsberg. You and I, we don't live in the same world, and if IZ is your attempt at communication, at conversation, I have to tell you that it hurts, it's unpleasant, and the natural reaction of the healthy organism is to withdraw from pain.

Sue Thomason
Borrow-in-Furness

Editorial Reply:

Sue Thomason's letter provokes several thoughts. For readers who know nothing of each new issue of a magazine until it appears on the racks or the mat, it's difficult to appreciate the process of editing it; and correspondingly easy to assume it represents, in every detail, the intentions of the editors rather than the product of circumstances.

It's always and all-importantly true that a fiction magazine is at the mercy of its contributors. We can't print what we don't get. What we do get are hundreds of manuscripts a year; but certain kinds of stories are significantly absent even in that huge sample. One kind is, for want of another terms, what Sue Thomason calls "life-affirming" stories. As she observes, *Interzone* has published some dark, downbeat stories. Richard Cowper's "The Tithonian Factor" is one exception. Today's writers seem to have a talent for darkness. If IZ "feels like the literature of a dehumanised culture", the reason probably lies in the dehumanised culture. To which Sue replies, "Perhaps because IZ has published a lot of downbeat stories, people don't submit happy ones to you because they think that's not what you're publishing. Self-fulfilling prophecy."

More disturbingly, the same notion appears to dissuade female writers. Clearly there are women who are not interested in submitting a story to be judged by several men. Two professional writers, one female, one male, recently told me they find it daunting to be faced with five editors at all, rather than one. But consider: no one has a veto. Each of us has stood aside more than once on behalf of a story others were enthusiastic about. You don't have to please us all, though in fact we do tend to agree. If we didn't we probably wouldn't have reached nine issues!

We're not interested in presenting you with an average selection, a balanced mix, or an imbalanced middle-of-the-road compromise among the stories we receive. When you're engaged in

publishing at most two dozen stories a year, you can't afford space for well-intentioned failures or interesting messes. So the criterion has to be proficiency. How well has this writer achieved what s/he's set out to do? Personal tastes can't be excluded, and shouldn't be, or we'd be labouring under the dangerous illusion that we could be objective. Moral and political values are inextricable from taste, of course; but the imagination is a slippery and lawless beast, and it's in the service of imagination rather than ideology that IZ was created and continues to work. Sue asks what we mean by "important fiction." In our seventh issue Michael Blumlein was walking right on the edge of the unacceptable. To me, that made "Tissue Ablation and Variant Regeneration" an important fiction, and important for us to publish. Imagination must challenge and unsettle the intelligence, as well as affirming life. It must do both, and preferably in the pages if IZ. But we can't print what we don't get.

Our policy to print the best imaginative fiction remains unchanged. In that same issue we spoke of "radical science fiction and fantasy—interpret that adjective as widely as you want". Our competition for "radical hard sf," announced last issue, is intended to stimu-

late another kind of writing we don't see much of here. If we did, we'd scarcely need to run a competition! But it's not the only kind we're interested in publishing. We were delighted when Abigail Frost and Bryan Williamson decided to set a second competition for a different kind of writing, fiction that looks at culture organically. Again, see last issue for details.

We are pleased with *Interzone*. But we're not complacent. We like what we've done. But there's plenty more to do.

Colin Greenland

ESSAY COMP

Yorcon 3, the 1985 Easter SF Convention, is organising an essay competition on the future of science fiction. The title is "What Do We Do Now That The Future's Here?". There will be a prize of £50 for the winner. The maximum word limit is 3000 and the deadline is 31 December 1984. The competition is open to all attending members of the convention. For full details write to 45 Harold Mount, Leeds LS6 1PW.

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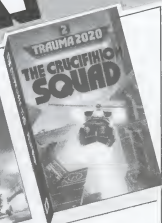
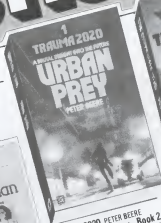
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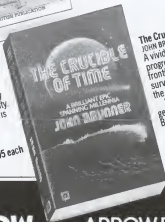
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